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THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "OLIVE" AND "THE OGILVIES."

CRAIK, John (Pencil)

"NON TI LAGNAR, MA SOFFRI, E TACI!"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

MDCCCLII.



THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

A PLEASANT thing is a family letter—a great epistolary nosegay, made up of all sorts of flowers. Ninian sat rejoicing over one of these, a fortnight or so after he had established himself in solitude at The Gowans. For, since that night when Rachel appeared at Musselburgh, he had felt that he was scarce welcome there. Nor could he breathe to any living soul the tragedy of that poor forlorn one's story.

She came and vanished, leaving no trace

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B

whatsoever behind. Day after day Mr. Græme waited, expecting to hear some tidings; but in vain. She never appeared more. He sent to the village where Jane Sedley lived. The old woman had been there, given up her cottage, and gone away. This was some satisfaction: for as long as the faithful creature was alive, Rachel would never be altogether deserted. To all other intents and purposes she was as one dead. Any hope of finding her was utterly impossible. So she disappeared—one more human being lost in the wide desert of the world. None had any right over her, or yearning after her; even Ninian, as amidst his many cares gradually the thought of her ebbed from his mind, could only say, with a pitying regret, “Poor thing, God help her, for none else can !”

Nevertheless, he left no search untried, and snatched at every possibility, near or remote, which might discover, or bring help to Rachel Armstrong. And never did he think of her but he thanked God for his own tender ones, safe under his care, to whom no

harm could come, and to whose nest the foot of wickedness should never approach.

He sat smiling over their letters—a most heterogeneous handful—reading them one after the other, quite unable to make up his mind as to which was the most interesting. The most prominent at all events, was Tinie's large, dashing, back-sloped hand—the most extraordinary hand for a little fairy like her to write; unless, as her sisters said, she had acquired it by mimicking the Professor's. Her letter was as eccentric as its caligraphy:

“ MY DARLING BROTHER,

“ You're a horrid creature, and you know it! You don't deserve a line, and yet I am going to write you a dozen or two, because I'm very lazy, and stupid, and cross. Our Sister won't let me go for a walk this morning with the boys, and the Professor, and Mr. Ulverston. I do believe she thinks I'm falling in love with the latter; and I have a great mind to do it, if only to vex

her. Ah, no! Poor dear sister Lindsay! even if she does go clucking after us wild young chickens, like an old grey hen; she keeps us warm under her wings.

“Brother, you can’t think what fun we are having. Such walking—such boating—such driving—for Mr. Ulverston has got a carriage down here. He is the very nicest young man that ever was born, and has such a bonnie bit of a moustache, which he twirls about in this fashion whenever he does the sentimental to us girls.”

(Here followed a pen-and-ink sketch that sent Ninian into a hearty fit of laughter. But it made him easy on one point: that the fair caricaturist was not likely to be in love with her “subject.”)

“That’s rather like his handsome phiz— isn’t it? Couldn’t you wear a moustache, now, brother Ninian? I suppose you think they wouldn’t suit the W. S. face? Nor the Professor’s either, though I have tried hard to coax him to it. He and ‘Desdichado’—we call him Desdichado, or the Disinherited

Knight, from a story he told us about some cousin turning up and stepping in between him and a title, though he has got the estate still, lucky fellow! Well, the Professor took Desdichado to live with him at Helensburgh. Even Dr. Reay is enchanted by this all-conquering knight. In fact, we are every one of us from Lindsay downwards, in love with Mr. Ulverston. When he really ‘gangs awa,’ it will be the old story of Willie and the lassies o’ Melville Castle :

‘ The cries o’ them brought Willie back
Ere he’d been lang awa’;
“ Oh lassies, bide till I come back,
An’ faith I’ll wed ye a’.” ’

“ — Here’s Hope peeping over my shoulder with her long face. ‘Tinie, dear, will your brother like such wild jests?’

“ Who cares! There never was such a stupid lassie as that lassie! When we are all laughing together with Desdichado (if he did but know I had christened him so!), there she sits in a corner, with her solemn face, that

never changes except to grow the colour of a peony.

“ I forgot to tell you that Edmund sends his love, and will write next time. He has grown very sentimental of late, and written oceans of poetry. One, on a Falling Leaf, Hope is now sitting copying out for Mr. Ulverston; and as it's rather long I suspect her letter to you will be short. But Desdichado wanted it to send to-night to a London periodical—(fancy Edmund's pride!)—and he would have it in Hope's hand, which he said was neater than mine. The wretch!

“ Ha, felicity! There they are, boys and all, down on the beach. I will take a hop skip and jump through the window, and be off in spite of Our Sister. ‘ Here, Hope, is a blank page—take the pen and finish.’ Good-by my darling, best, sweetest, most good-for-nothing of brothers.

“ Your own

“ TINIE.”

Here, creeping in under an infinitude

of flourishes, was the delicate writing that Ninian himself had tried to form out of Hope's pointed school-girl scrawl. And she had taken such pains to please him ! He almost fancied he now saw her little face looking up full of anxiety, or her pleasant laugh as he praised her and told her she would soon write well enough for him to hire her as a copying-clerk :

“ DEAR MR. GRÆME,

“ Tinie thought I should not write much, but I shall. How could I neglect you for anybody ? We are all very happy, but we do not forget you ; and I am sure I hope you are not very dull all alone by yourself at The Gowans. It is getting quite autumnal weather now, and Lindsay greatly wishes to be at home. I think, indeed, she would be happier if you would send for us to come back, though Tinie and the twins do not like the idea of leaving their beloved Gare-Loch. I love it too ; I am perfectly happy here ; but Lindsay ought to be considered before any one.

“Tinie said I might read over her letter, lest we should both tell you the same news. You must not mind her nonsense. She is very good, I can assure you, and a great deal wiser than she makes herself out to be. So clever too! I am afraid you will find my letter very stupid after hers; and I cannot think of anything worth saying, or at least worth saying to you.—

“— I had to break off here—for Ruth and Esther being gone a walk, Lindsay wanted me to make the pudding. I am growing a thorough little housekeeper, you see, under her instructions. I should be able to take better care of you now than I did when Lindsay was ill, and your sisters away. I cannot write more, for they are all coming in to dinner. I hope you are quite well now. Lindsay said, after you were gone, that you had not been well; how wrong of me not to notice it! Dear Mr. Græme, believe me, your affectionate friend (here the word ‘little’ was afterwards inserted before ‘friend,’

as if she thought the signature not respectful enough),

“HOPE ANSTED.”

Heaven knows how many simple letters from simple-minded women have been kissed, cherished, or wept over by men of far loftier intellect. Therefore it was no marvel that the childish epistle of Hope Ansted was read and re-read with lingering eyes and a throbbing heart. So it will always be to the end of time. It is a lesson worth learning by those young creatures who seek to allure by their accomplishments, or to dazzle by their genius, that though he may admire, no man ever loves a woman for these things. He loves her for what is essentially distinct from, though not positively incompatible with them—her woman's nature and her woman's heart. That is why we so often see a man of high genius or intellectual power pass by the De Staëls and the Corinnes, to take into his bosom some wayside flower who has nothing on earth to make her worthy him,

except that she is, what so few of your "female celebrities" are—a true woman.

Ninian, even while laughing over his sister's epistle, had been somewhat chafed therewith; but Hope's letter came like balm. He read it many times over, with a satisfied sense of her innocent tenderness. Better have that than nothing! He took it—all he dared take or try to win—and was thankful. Perhaps sometimes despite his will, the vague hope would arise that the whirl of coming years might throw some blessings on his path. But he knew he must not think of that; the present was enough.

There was one more letter, in Lindsay's small, old-fashioned hand—she had been educated ere penny-post days introduced the epistolary mania. Ninian knew it was a trouble to her to write a letter, and that she never did so except on rare and earnest occasions:

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"I write these few lines while the children are in bed, to say that if it quite

suits you, I rather wish we could come home. The children would be better at their studies again—do you not think so?—Edmund especially. I am a little anxious over the boy. He is very quiet and dull. He will scarcely notice any one but Hope; and he sits and looks at her by the hour together. It is almost ridiculous in me to have such notions, but I am half afraid he is falling in love with Hope. In his light, boyish way I mean; but he may soon get over it. She does not even perceive it, the innocent child. Still it makes me uneasy about my dear boy.

“And Tinie is rather thoughtless in the matter of Mr. Ulverston, who, I fear, cannot consider her such a well-behaved young lady as Ninian Græme’s sister ought to be. In spite of her wild letter, you need not be afraid; we shall not have the place of Mr. MacCallum taken by Mr. Ulverston. He is an agreeable young man. I once thought he admired Hope, for he asked a great deal about her, and of course I answered him truly; but he has never taken much notice

of her since. Oh! what trouble these young people are!

“It was very kind of you to let Miss Reay remain, and the Professor was much gratified. I hope you are well, and that Katie makes you comfortable. Tell Katie, I wish that before we return she would take down the muslin curtains and put up the green moreen, &c., &c.”

But with this domestic phase in Miss Græme's correspondence we stop, as Ninian did.

He pondered long over his sister's letter; it had made him anxious. He left his solitary breakfast, always made too early for the appearance of Miss Reay, and walked two or three times up and down his beloved garden, before he could quite recover his equanimity. Then he came in, and wrote a “General Epistle,” full of his own grave jokes and queer sayings, winding up by a loving summons to his household to come home. The time thus fixed was a week sooner than he

had at first intended; but he reconciled it to himself as being Lindsay's desire and Hope's. At least, Hope did not say she would be unwilling to return. But still that line of hers—"I am perfectly happy here"—jarred on his remembrance. Alas! did any of us weak loving ones ever gladly hear that the beloved had been "perfectly happy" where we were not? It matters not how we disguise it, we are all selfish at the core; but those for whom we err and suffer ought to be patient and merciful with us, as Heaven is. One day we shall learn to love all purely and without selfish sorrow, even as do the angels.

Ninian at last received his wanderers home. It was a blithe returning; as all seemed to feel when they drew the curtains close, and Ninian, having vacated his arm-chair for the sake of the wearied Lindsay, came and sat in the midst of them. Tinie leaned against his knee, to the manifest disquiet of his pet cat, who seemed to have a grim foreboding that the peaceful solitude of The Gowans was now ended. Hope, by a sort of tacit habit,

came to Ninian's other side. He heard her say, with a sort of happy sigh,

"Ah, how pleasant it is to be at home!"

The innocent words thrilled him with an infinite joy, that blotted out everything except the present day—the present hour. He was his own cheerful self once more, such as he had rarely been at the Gare-Loch. He kept his brothers and sisters in a state of perpetual merriment, until Tinie remarked, with a comical dimple at the corner of her mouth, and a sly glance at her younger brothers, that he was almost as amusing as Desdichado himself.

"And what has become of the valorous Desdichado? I declare I had quite forgotten him. Come, Tinie, tell me what sort of a farewell you took of your knight."

"My knight!" said Tinie, with a positive, undoubted blush. "Don't be stupid, brother Ninian."

"Well, everybody's knight, since you will not acknowledge him. Where was he left?"

"He has gone to Fingal's Cave with the

Professor," said Tinie. "Perhaps he may return through Edinburgh, on his way to London, where he will settle for the winter. Was not that what he said, Hope?"

"I really don't remember. He never talked much to me, you know," was Hope's answer, with a quiet, indifferent air. And Ninian, who had turned quickly round to watch her, turned back again smiling. It was very odd, such an anxious brother as he was,—that in this matter he never thought of or noticed Tinie.

When he had sent his little flock to bed, and sat musing in his study, he was perfectly startled by the apparition of his youngest sister, in a very demure face and a white dressing-gown.

"You nonsensical brother! You took me for a ghost, did you?" cried she, utterly unable to resist her inclination to laugh; then trying to recollect herself, she assumed a countenance of grave importance, which produced an effect still more comical.

"Nay, lassie, the nonsense is on your side. You ought to have been asleep by this

time. Come, my little spectre, what's the reason that you walk the night in this unseemly fashion? Do you want more kisses? I thought I gave you the prescribed number before you went away."

"Ay, that you did. You made all the rest jealous, especially Hope. She said she could not imagine why she did not get even one."

"Indeed! Well, I will remember the child to-morrow," said Ninian, with a faint attempt to laugh. "But now, if that is all you had to say, go you to bed—quick! You look quite tired; almost as white as a real ghost."

"I dare say I do. I have had a great deal to trouble me to-day."

Her comically-pathetic voice made Ninian laugh in earnest this time. "I beg your pardon, Tinie, if there is anything really the matter; but I can hardly believe it, when you are, as the children say, 'laughing with your mouth, and crying with your eyes!'"

"I'm not laughing, and I'm not crying. I am sure I thought you would call me a very good girl for coming to tell you this."

“To tell me what?” said Ninian, rather more seriously.

“It isn’t my fault, I assure you, brother. I can’t help it, if these things will happen.”

“What has happened?”

“Nothing very terrible. You need not look so frightened. Only—please don’t be angry—but—but—Mr. Ulverston made love to me yesterday.”

This melancholy confession being delivered with a solemn, penitential air, Tinie heaved a great sigh of relief, and sat down with the look of a person who has done an unpleasant duty, and expects to be much praised for the same. She was considerably surprised when Ninian, after a slight start, and a muttered ejaculation that sounded very like “Confound him!”—relapsed into perfect silence. In fact, he was completely puzzled. With all his brotherly forethought and watchful observation, he had never for a moment contemplated such a possibility as this.

Tinie began to look disappointed. “Well, brother, have you not a word to say? I

thought you would be pleased with me for coming to tell you this at once," she said, with a little spirit of mischief twinkling in her eyes.

"Pleased ! of course I am—with your candour, I mean. But I am so amazed. This is the last thing I should ever have expected."

"Indeed !" answered the little coquette, with the faint shadow of a pout. "I don't see anything so very wonderful in it. Perhaps you think, as Lindsay seems to do, that nobody would admire any of us when Hope was by."

Her chance finger had touched a quivering string ; he *had* thought so. With something like self-reproach, though for what he hardly knew, he drew his sister to him, and put his arm round her neck.

"Don't be a foolish lassie. I suppose you expect your brother to feel very proud of the awful amount of admiration you get. But what if he should be jealous too ?"

"Ah, that's delicious !" cried Tinie, with her

immemorial clap of the hands, which showed she had gained exactly what she wanted. And then, with an after-thought, she tried to subside into the bashful propriety necessary on the occasion. It rather deceived Ninian as to the real state of the case.

“Come, my dear,” said he, gravely, “we must not jest now; you must tell me more. Am I to understand”—and his old tenderness over his pet gave a regretful tone to his voice—“am I to understand that a second suitor wishes immediately to carry away my wee sister from me?”

“He did not exactly say that,” stammered Tinie, who, with all her vagaries, was a truthful little thing.

“Then, what did he say? That is—if you have no objection to tell me.”

“Oh dear no! not the least. He said ‘that I was a lively little angel, and he was a lonely, miserable man, and he did not know how he should ever endure existence after parting from me;’ and—and—all that sort of thing. You know!”

“ I really don’t,” answered Ninian, unable to repress a smile. “ I am not exactly *au fait* in ‘ that sort of thing.’ ”

“ Of course not. Nobody ever suspected you, my wise brother. But you said I must tell you if anything—that is, if anybody—were again to——”

“ To try and steal my little sister’s heart. Well—is it stolen ?”

“ How can you talk of such a thing !” cried Tinie, laughing and blushing. She certainly was the most wayward little creature in the world. Ninian felt his patience begin to ebb away.

“ I do not like quite so much jesting, Tinie. Tell me seriously, did Mr. Ulverston propose to you, or did he merely repeat the sentimental nothings that seem to have kept such a fast hold of your memory.”

“ Now, that’s very hard ! I do just as you desire me, and tell you all people say to me, and then you’re cross. I don’t understand such treatment, brother Ninian. I am sure Mr. Ulverston would be a great deal more kind to me than you.”

“Are you then in earnest?” said Ninian, with a vague alarm. “And do you really think this man is in earnest too?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t care, except that you might be a little more polite to your friend than to call him ‘this man.’”

The brother had gone rather too far. He had awakened a certain feminine vanity, which did not like its conquest to be decried or doubted.

“I cannot tell how it is, Tinie, but these love affairs seem to produce a jarring between you and me. We were a great deal happier when you were still a child, and did not meddle with such matters. Forgive me if I vex you in any way—I only desire to see you good and happy.”

“My dear brother!” She seemed touched, and put up her face to kiss him.

“Now, my pet, being friends again, will you hear what I have to say?”

Tinie sat down on the floor, and folded her hands with a very humble and demure look.

“Of course,” he said, “you can’t help being

bonnie and lively; nor that other people admire you besides your brother. I don't want to monopolise you, my lassie; in fact, I suppose I will have to resign you altogether some of those days. But still I had rather not resign you to Mr. Ulverston."

"Why not? Though, mind, I never said I should ask you. Still, why not?"

"Because I think he is too light and thoughtless—too much like Tinie herself, in short. When I give her up out of my care, it should be into that of some one a good deal graver and older than herself."

"Oh, indeed. Thank you!" The little head was turned away, and her fingers began picking the worsted out of a darn—not the only one, alas!—on Ninian's study-carpet.

"Beside, though I know nothing evil of Mr. Ulverston, there is a certain something about him that I don't quite like. I suppose it is the Irish nature in him—I mean the bad half of Irish nature, for there is a good half too. He may not be insincere, but he is evidently changeable as the

wind. From his conversation, I suspect he has said the same thing that he said to you to half a dozen girls, and may to half a dozen more. I should be very sorry for my wee sister to believe him or love him, and perhaps to break her little heart about him."

"She wouldn't break her heart, indeed; and she does not love him, or anybody, but her own brother—the nicest and best brother that ever was born," cried Tinie, as she jumped on Ninian's knee (a throne divided between her and the cat), and very nearly smothered him with caresses. Truly this warm sisterly love would have covered a multitude of Tinie's little sins.

"So then——"

" 'We will proceed no further in this business,' " said Ninian, with one of his mock-tragic quotations from his favourite poet, always a sign that he was in high good humour. "If Mr. Ulverston comes to Edinburgh, why—well! if not, why—well too!"

"Well—better—best, I think," whispered Tinie, merrily.

“Therefore we need not talk any more about him. But,” added Ninian, with a sudden thought, “have you told any one of this?”

“No, indeed! not even Hope. She scolded me so—at least, not scolded, but seemed so shocked about the other affair. I wouldn’t have her know on any account.”

It was one of the curious contradictions of the human mind, but Ninian almost wished that Hope had known of Mr. Ulverston’s love-making to Tinie.

“And, my dear, you are sure no one noticed these attentions and pretty speeches of his?”

“No one—except, perhaps, the Professor, who was behind us at the time. If he heard, I dare say he thought me a very foolish girl.”

“Most likely he never thought about the matter at all. People of his age and pursuits ‘canna be fashed’ with listening or attending to the affairs of wild lassies like you.”

“Indeed! Well, I don’t care!”

The rather sulky "don't care" struck Ninian as inapplicable ; but he did not give it a second thought. He was just then considering whether he had not judged Mr. Ulverston too harshly. And as he patted and stroked the dainty head that lay on his shoulder, he thought that such blithe sweetness might well have won anybody, and possibly the wooing was in earnest after all. However, he said nothing, but determined to let things take their own course. Still, he must have good proof that Mr. Ulverston was worthy, before he ever resigned his pet sister.

For some minutes he made himself a patient martyr to 'Tinie's caresses ; not that he did not like them—for her affection had been always very sweet to him—the more so, as he, of all the family, chiefly engrossed it. But in their long absence, and in the various strange moods and struggles of this year, all home affections seemed to have loosened from him in some slight degree, or from their imperceptible sweetness to have grown into perceptible duties. And somehow love is best when not even self-conscious ; when

it lives in us as invisible and unfelt as our heart's pulse, or the breath we draw.

With a mingling of many feelings, in which a vague compunction was not the least, Ninian leaned his head upon his sister's, and was silent. Her little tongue ran on the while fast and merry, until at last through very weariness she ceased, and he tried to send her off to bed. She had reached the door—when she came back again.

“Just one word, brother. You are quite sure you are not cross with me?”

“Not a jot, my wee thing!”

“And, supposing the Professor did overhear the nonsense Mr. Ulverston said, you'll try and make him understand that I'm not quite so foolish as he thinks me, but mean to be a very good child and—go on with my studies. You'll tell him that, won't you?”

“I'll tell anybody anything you like if you'll only go to bed,” cried Ninian, in a state of perfect despair.

Immediately the white vision vanished, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER II.

THE household fell into its old ways. Every one at The Gowans seemed to carry a blithe heart and a cheerful countenance except Edmund.

The boy was struggling with the restlessness and melancholy peculiar to all young minds, especially to those of fine and rare order. He moped about for days together, doing nothing ; or else lay reading, his choice being principally that wild poetry of passion and emotion so attractive in early life, of which every young Rasselas tries to make himself wings to soar out of the Happy Valley of childhood into manhood's stormy world. Now and then, this excitement ceas-

ing, poor Edmund used to roam about the garden the very picture of despair, frightening his sister Lindsay with his pale face, his expressions of dire woe, and his dark hints that "he knew he should make an end of himself some time."

We smile at these vagaries as we grow older, and contemplate with much amusement the numbers of worthy middle-aged individuals, cheerful, respectable authors, or hard-working men of business,—merry old bachelors, or happy fathers of families,—all of whom were in their youth the wretchedest of mortals, talking perpetually of "misery" and "self-destruction." It seems ridiculous now, but it was awfully real at the time. It is no more than a phase of mind which almost every one goes through (except those worthies untroubled with any brains at all, who generally pass through life quite comfortably, and are the most "jolly" people imaginable). But for those others, whose spirits must meet and endure this bitter ordeal, they should be dealt with tenderly,

and borne with patiently, until the trouble ends. It is the portion of all finer natures ; the restless want—the vague aspiring ; the perpetually striving for perfection in poetic dreamings—in idle love-fancies, inconstant as air, each seeking after something diviner or more beautiful, which is never found ; in knowledge, or in the frenzied dissipation of pleasure ; all alike ending in nothing, until the only truth of life seems to be that bitterest one of Solomon the Preacher—“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity !”

This is, perhaps, the story of every human mind in which shines one spark of the fire of genius ; the story's beginning—but, thank God ! not necessarily its end. Many a great, strong spirit has passed—and all can pass—out of the cloudy void into a clear day. Shakspeare, who must once have felt, or he could not have painted young *Hamlet*, reached at last the divine height where in the universal poet we lose all trace of the individual man ; and he who once wrote the “Sorrows

of Werter," lived to be that great Goethe, who, from his lofty calm of eighty-two years, could look back on what was, as near as any human life could be, a perfect and fulfilled existence.

These are hopes, helps, and comforts: it was unfortunate that there chanced to be no one to hold out such unto poor young Edmund. bewildering himself amidst the troublous maze. Unhappy he was, yet not knowing why; fancying himself in love, trying to shape every fair face or graceful mind into the image of his fancy; and as each faded by turns—ay, even Hope—into the mere likeness of ordinary girlhood, becoming disgusted with them, himself, and the whole world. At last, when "Edmund's fickleness," and "Edmund's new sweethearts," became a general family jest, the poor fellow lost somewhat of his gentle temper, and was growing fast into a juvenile misanthrope.

Then the elder brother stepped in to the rescue. He would have done so long before,

but that he really did not quite understand the boy. Nature moulds her children so differently. Ninian's manly, self-dependent character, could scarcely conceive the almost feminine vacillation, sensitiveness, and weakness, with which Edmund had to contend. But this he saw, that something was amiss, and that a change was necessary in the boy's life. The old scheme now laid aside for months—the London journey—was once more projected.

And, as if all good angels were smoothing away obstacles to the fulfilment of the boy's sickly longing, the sole remaining objection of Ninian and Lindsay was overruled by a sudden announcement made by Professor Reay. Kenneth walked into The Gowans one evening, sat as usual by the hearth in his silent, absent way, for an hour or two, and then observed :

“ I am come to say good-by. I am not going to live in Edinburgh any longer.”

The household were all struck dumb except Tinie, who burst into a fit of laughter

so wild, that at the end of it she looked quite pale and exhausted.

“ Yes, I am really leaving,” said Kenneth Reay, in answer to the throng of questions. “ I have asked and obtained an appointment in one of the two London Colleges ; and I go there next week.”

This was all the information he gave, and nothing more could be got out of him. But in the gossip of the womenkind together, it was discovered that the appointment was a highly lucrative one, and that the Professor had been lured into changing his old house for a goodly establishment in the metropolis, to be placed, with his unfortunate self, under the superintendence of Miss Reay.

“ Ah, Ninian!” hinted the anxious elder sister, “ I think my dear boy would be safe there. Otherwise, I don’t believe I dare let him go. So, with her gentleness and perseverance, she managed to smooth away all difficulties, and the matter was settled. For Edmund, though in his state of sublime melancholy and indifference he made believe

to take no heed of the preparations for his benefit, yet he evidently enjoyed all. He roused himself sufficiently to collect his favourite books ; and now and then was heard to expatiate on various literary introductions promised aforetime by Mr. Ulverston, who, however, with his usual Hibernian obliviousness, had from Fingal's Cave disappeared, and been heard of no more.

Happy little Tinie! — well for her she had such a merry untouched heart! She never “wore the willow” at all; it was a tree that did not grow in her garden. She was the very first of the family to forget Mr. Ulverston and his perfections.

The time was talked of for Edmund's departure. “He must stay over Hogmanay, we couldn't have a happy new year without Edmund,” was the general exclamation, as if all felt there was a certain sadness in this first breaking of the family bond. The boy himself seemed to feel it least, dazzled as he was by the splendour of his own secret dreams.

"You are not anxious about him now, Lindsay?" said Ninian. "He is as satisfied as ever he can be; he will not break his heart for Hope or for any one."

Lindsay smiled, with a puzzled air. She had troubled herself in vain over the ins and outs of Edmund's variable affections, until at last she gave up the matter in despair. "Yes, brother, I suppose you are right."

"I knew it would be so. Boys' loves generally pass away like morning clouds," Ninian continued. (Perhaps he spoke from experience; most men could.) "Besides, it was not his first affair. Once upon a time—except for the utter ridiculousness of the thing—I fancied he was ready to 'go daft' after Rachel. Yet now he has quite forgotten her. He scarcely even seemed to care when he knew she had gone away, and that we should not see her any more."

"Poor Rachel! she was a strange creature; I am rather glad she never took to any of the girls," answered Lindsay, who knew Mrs. Forsyth's version of the story and no more.

But she saw a sorrowful compassion troubling Ninian's face; so was silent. Just then some invisible household-sprite had whispered in her ear that the Hogmanay-cake in the oven *might* be burning; which caused her to vanish immediately towards the inferior regions.

That day—the last of the Old Year—Ninian returned early from his office.

“Edmund, I hear that you must positively be off with the Professor on January 2nd, and as we will have no doleful preparations on New Year's Day, bring your books, and I'll help you to pack this afternoon.”

Edmund said he had been busy about that duty for four days; but as his peculiar notion of packing appeared to be taking books from one side of the room and strewing them over the other, his elder brother's offer was by no means so unnecessary as the boy seemed at first to think. So they both shut themselves up in Ninian's study for an hour.

“Are you two never coming? We are all ready in the parlour, and Lindsay has sent

me to fetch you," said a voice, preceded by a gentle knock, which marked it to belong to the only one who ever paid the deference of knocking at Mr. Græme's study door. He looked up, smiling.

"Come in, Hope—ay, that's right. Why, what a bonnie sight you are!"

She was indeed. She had on an evening-dress of white, that neat attire the prettiness of which ought to console maidens of light purse for all the finery in the world. A spray or two of glossy-leaved, red-berried holly was fastened in her hair. Her arms and neck shone through the thin muslin; in her usual close home-costume no one had ever seen how round and white they were. She looked so bright—so happy—so innocently proud of herself; it was indeed

"A sure cure for sad eyes
To gaze upon her face."

Ninian paused in his work. He was kneeling beside the box, in the midst of a heterogeneous heap of books, plaster casts, &c. His appearance was not the most elegant, he

being *minus* his coat, with his hands all covered with dust, and his curly hair, one of the few perfections he had, tossed about in the wildest confusion.

“ Well—do you like me ? Am I bonnie to-night ? ” said Hope, merrily. “ And we are all dressed the same, just like sisters. We have stolen the prettiest holly-branches in your garden, Mr. Græme ; and you will have the pleasure of seeing them in our hair. Look ! ”

She came closer, and put her head on one side to show him.

“ Very nice. There, turn round, and let me admire you ; nay, don't be afraid, my white bird, I shall not touch your snowy feathers with these hands,” said Ninian, smiling. But while he smiled, there came unwittingly a bitter sense of contrast between this fairy creature and himself. He could not bear to see her shrink from him, even in play.

“ Now, fly away, birdie ; you seem, indeed, just ready to fly, on some sort of wings or other. You don't belong to us of the work-a-day world.”

“ I don’t quite know what you mean. Are you not pleased with me? I thought you would be.”

“ And thought rightly, my little Hope. But run away : you see Edmund has gone to dress already. He vanished like a ghost.”

“ Of course ! His last sweetheart is coming to tea to-night.”

Ninian stooped over his packing. Somehow he did not like to hear her jest about such things. “ I will have done directly, Hope ; don’t let me detain you here.”

“ But I like to be detained,” said Hope, balancing her lithe figure on the arm of a chair. “ I shall stay and watch you.”

“ A pretty sight for a fair lady’s eyes—am I not, now ? I know you are half afraid lest some one might come in and find me thus ; then how ashamed you would be of your guardian.”

“ Ashamed, because he was a kind brother, giving himself all sorts of trouble and disagreeable work to please Edmund ? No !” she added, energetically, “ I had rather see you

there, with your grimed hands and face—ay, there is actually a black mark on your face, too—than look at the finest gentleman in a ball-room !”

“ Would you, Hope? Would you, dear child ?”

“ And to show you I am not alarmed for my finery, and don’t mind coming near you and touching you, as you thought I should—look here !”

She came, stepping over the chaos of rubbish ; sat down in her white dress on the old box, and laid her two hands in Ninian’s ; —hers seeming by the contrast so soft, white, and small. He looked at them and at her face,—then closed his eyes. He felt the rising of one of those storms of almost uncontrollable passion, which women can scarcely understand, but which this man, whose love was at once so tender and so strong, had to fight with day by day.

“ What is the matter with you, Mr. Græme ?” cried Hope, her merry smiles fading.

“ I am dizzy—with stooping, perhaps. Wait a minute—never mind.”

He sat down on the floor, leaning his arm against the box, and laying his head upon it.

“ How you have tired yourself! You should not, indeed. And that naughty boy Edmund has left you so much to do still. Come, let me help you. I should be so glad to help you in anything.”

“ Should you, with those hands? How tiny they are and soft !” He took them, played with them a little, and then—he could not have helped it had it been his life’s worth—he stooped and crushed his lips upon them, wildly and long.

Hope looked amazed, and something of a womanly blush dawned in her innocent face. Ninian rose.

“ So, you *exigeante* damsel, you can’t want more. You make even your staid guardian turn into a ‘*preux chevalier*,’ and kiss your hand,—kneeling, too, I declare. A pity there was nobody here to see the exhibition ! But come, vanish ! or I will turn you out.”

She laughed, still blushing slightly, and ran away. Ninian walked to the door—fastened it—then staggered back, and lay on the floor where he had sat with the child close near. There was beside him a holly leaf, which had fallen out of her hair. He snatched it—the sharp thorns bruised his lips, but he kissed it still, in the very madness of a boy.

There was now a whole chorus of voices at his door. He must be once more Ninian Græme in his calmness, his gravity, his elder brotherhood of more than thirty years.

When the Last Day comes, and the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, how some of us will shudder, and wonder, and weep!—how, if a few hypocrites we knew may then appear black and ghastly through the rendings of their fair disguise—there will be others—alas! deceivers likewise; since when they walked with us we knew them but as ordinary people fulfilling their round of little pleasures and little cares; liked and disliked, while we praised and blamed them, as our fancy led.

But, knowing them at last truly, we shall in That Day learn, with marvel and with awe, that some of Heaven's chiefest saints and martyrs were not holier than they !

Hogmanay was this year kept in grander style than it had ever been celebrated in the Græme family. Still, fits of dulness came over them now and then—at least over Lindsay, who watched her boy with eyes from which all her struggles could not sometimes drive back the tears. Edmund too was rather grave—the girls said because his “last sweetheart” had not made her appearance. But Ninian knew him better than that. They two had had a long talk together over the book-packing, and every look the boy cast on his elder brother showed how deeply and tenderly Ninian's words had fallen on his softened heart.

“Nay, I can't have any dreariness to-night, children,” said Mr. Græme. “If we are to dance the New Year in, we must begin in earnest. Come, Edmund, lead off with Hope, and Tinie, here's my great ugly paw,

if your ladyship will accept it? Strike up, Lindsay."

And Lindsay, whose proficiency in dance-music was a merit not light, since she had learnt it only for the children's pleasure, having for it little liking and less ear, struck up accordingly, and played until her fingers ached.

"Now for a reel, for which the twins seem quite ready—such thorough Scotch lassies at they are! Tinie scorns it, I understand."

"That's Mr. Ulverston's teaching," scowled Reuben. "Well, if people must make fools of themselves by dancing at all, the best thing is to do it thoroughly. So here goes for a reel."

And, despite his contemptuous condescension, the young cynic was very soon snapping his fingers, and grinning widely with delight as he executed the convolutions and whirls of that merriest of all dances, which, as executed by Esther and Ruth, sonsie lassies, light, strong, and well-matched, was a performance remarkable for grace as well as spirit.

Ninian and the Professor, whose "week" had somehow extended to the miraculous length of fifteen days, leaned against the mantelpiece and looked on; the latter beginning to discourse on the probable origin of Scotch reels, and Gaelic dances in especial, including the Sword-dance and the one called Gillie Callum.

"Ah! you'll show me the Sword-dance, Professor? I do so want to learn it. You know you said you could dance it when you were a boy," cried Tinie, who had flitted round and round about her brother and Dr. Reay. "You cannot refuse, when you're going away the day after to-morrow," she added, with a little—a very little piteousness of face, which was doubled and trebled in that of Kenneth. He yielded at once.

Whereupon Miss Christina took the poker and tongs, laid them crosswise on the floor, and actually coaxed the Professor's unwieldy feet into antics indescribable, performed between the interstices of the fire-irons. After which she pushed him away and began to

mimic the same herself. Hope stood by, quite absorbed in the amusement, and laughing heartily.

Ninian went and sat in his arm-chair. He watched them all for a time with his cheerful smile. Gradually his hand fell over his eyes, and he sunk into deep thought. No one noticed him. They went on dancing; even Hope's quiet English blood being stirred into excitement by the mirth of the moment. He saw her floating among his young brothers and sisters; he heard her laugh, softer, but almost as gay as Tinie's.

"Ay," he murmured to himself, "'Tis *better as it is,*' as my good friend *Othello* says. It might in the end be like the story of the white-rose tree—the one she admired—which I was so foolish as to keep in my dark study. Of course it pined and would not grow. I had better have put it out into the sunny garden, and seen it only now and then; *it* at least would then have been happy. And so will she, my bonnie white rose!"

There was a hand on his shoulder, and

Edmund stood by him. "Brother Ninian," said he, with an anxious, contrite look.

"So, have you danced enough? Do you want me to take your place? But I can't, my boy; I am tired!"

"I see that. I often see you look tired now, or hear Lindsay say you do. Ah, brother," cried Edmund, with a burst of the old fraternal affection, which had been closer between him and Ninian than between any of the other boys, "don't let me go away! I ought not, indeed."

"Nay—why so?"

"Because you are already hard-worked, and have many cares; I might help you a little, being next eldest. I'll stay—ay, and work in the office too, if you will only let me."

"There's a good boy, and a kind boy! But no; it is not necessary. You are not fit for that sort of life. We cannot harness young antelopes to waggons, you know! Let your elder brother do that duty. He is a good draught-horse, and he likes it!"

"Are you sure of that?"

“Quite sure. There was a time, as I told you in the study, when I had my wandering notions as well as other youths; but I knew all this was wrong, and ought not to be, so I struggled and—conquered. We have all battles to fight: you will too, my boy, as I forewarned you.”

“Yes, I know.”

“And you will have plenty of hard work likewise, more than you look for, ere you become — what I long to see you — the Great Man of the Family.”

Edmund laughed, but there was a quiver in that beautiful mouth of his, which while indicating exquisite sensitiveness of feeling, also indicated the great deficiency of his character—want of will.

“—Come, the ‘wee hours’ are drawing on:

‘The Old Year lies a-dying,’

as Edmund would poetically observe,” cried Timie. “What are you two doing, sentimentalising there? Literally, laying your heads together! Get away with you, Edmund! This is my place.”

With a comical jealousy, always evinced by her when any of the others were particularly noticed by her favourite brother, she ousted Edmund, and enthroned herself on the arm of the chair, throwing her arm round Ninian's neck.

"Now, brother—now, Professor, take out your watches. A quarter to twelve?—Twenty minutes? Ah, we'll keep by the Professor's time, seeing he always takes it by the forelock."

"Tinie, the atrocity of your jokes is fortunately equalled by their rarity," said Reuben, in a sarcastic parenthesis.

"Little boys shouldn't interrupt when their elders are making a speech," was the indignant answer. "Now I put it to the vote, what will we do in these twenty minutes? Shall Edmund indulge us with some readings? He's off for Tennyson already, I'll engage! Bravo—let us all chorus the lines:

'He gave me a friend and a true, true love,'
(Three, I believe, to Edmund)—

'And the New Year will take them away.'"

There was a brief silence, as if this quotation fell somewhat *mal-à-propos*. It seemed to make them feel, as all must at times, even amidst the merriest of New Year frolics—of the possibilities that may come with twelve months' change.

Ninian spoke first—perhaps his thoughts were such as would least bear dwelling on. “Nay, we will have no reading, lest we should get solemn. Come, I give you all your choice; must we dance the New Year in, or jump it in, or——”

“I don’t understand,” said Hope, somewhat puzzled. She had crept near; and, rather tired and out of breath, was leaning against the back of Mr. Græme’s chair, until Tinie proposed sharing the arm of it with her. Ninian made a few attempts to move, but his young jailors held him fast; so he was obliged to submit. This little interlude being ended, he explained what he meant by jumping the New Year in—namely, that it was considered lucky on the clock’s

striking twelve to begin and jump step by step up-stairs, without speaking a word.

“I should like to try it, if it would only bring me a fortunate year,” said Hope, rather seriously. “At least,” added she, with a grateful look at Ninian, and another, very loving, at Lindsay and the rest, “if it would only make this New Year as happy as the old.”

“Now, Hope, we will not be sentimental; and I don’t like jumping up-stairs; we’ll bring in the New Year as we always do—a very nice way. You’ll see!” cried Tinie.

The house-clock began to strike. “Ay, there it goes,” said Ninian; “is it right by your watch, Professor?—Yes!—Ah, well, good-by Old Year!” And he sighed, even as if this had been the last of his happy years.

He waited until the last sound of the clock had ceased, then took a light in his hand and went forward, according to an old custom, more English than Scotch, which had somehow become engrafted on the

family, to open the hall-door and let in the New Year. They all followed in a confused troop, some merrier than others, but every one eagerly pressing forward. Lindsay came last, with a quiet composed sadness in her look. To her all New Years were now the same. They could not bring her either a joy or a sorrow beyond those she had already known, and out-lived.

The little party crowded back. "Now everybody must kiss everybody!" cried Tinie; after which lucid explanation she began this august ceremony, the crowning triumph of Hogmanay, by bestowing a hearty embrace on her brother Ninian. The whole family circle went through the same affectionate duty in a combination of infinite reduplications; the only exception to the "everybody" being Kenneth Reay, who stood on the hearth and looked on the fire. He was not accustomed to this sort of amusement.

When it was concluded, Ninian said gravely, with a trembling tenderness in his

voice, "Sister Lindsay, and children all, a happy New Year to you all! And, until the next, may God bless us and take care of us, every one, especially Edmund!"

All eyes turned upon the boy with a regretful kindness—some even dimmed with tears. They had teased Edmund and loved to teaze him; they had even quarrelled with him sometimes, as brothers and sisters always quarrel, but still they now felt that he was one of them—the first brother leaving the family home. They went up to him, one after the other, the two younger boys shaking hands with him with a brave contempt of any further weakness than—"Take care of yourself, old fellow," while the girls hung about his neck and kissed him.

At last poor Edmund, fairly unmanned, and being but a tender-hearted youth at the best, hid his face on Lindsay's shoulder and—made a baby of himself! Afterwards, his newly-fledged dignity and boyish pride being quite subdued,—until the household separated he sat beside his elder sister watching her sorrowful countenance, or fol-

lowed her quietly about, doing all sorts of little things for her which he had never condescended to do before, and which he would soon do no longer.

In a little time the festivities ceased, and the younger ones, together with the twins, were despatched to bed. Lindsay disappeared for the domestic duty of putting things a little in order. As for Tinie, she, with unaccountable wilfulness, had run up the garden to unlock the gate for Dr. Reay, insisting moreover on doing it alone, since the hour between twelve and one on a New Year's Eve is supposed to be the time when ghosts and goblins "most do congregate;" and she said she particularly wished to see one in the avenue.

Ninian was left by himself in the parlour. He stood leaning on the mantelpiece with both his arms. Heavy clouds of thought swept over him—he could not drive them away.

There was a step—the step that, light as

it was, he somehow invariably heard all over the house. Hope entered.

"I am come back to bid you good-night, Mr. Græme. Tinie carried me off so hastily, that I forgot to do so before."

"Never mind, my dear."

"Nay, I do mind, and it was very wrong of me; but I think you have forgot something too."

"Have I?—very likely," he answered, with an absent, weary air. He felt indeed weary of himself and of the world.

"Do you know—I hope you will not be vexed at my reminding you—but do you know you never have wished me a happy New Year?"

"Have I not? Well, I do so now, then," said he, holding out his hand, without looking towards her.

Her voice took a pained tone. "Dear Mr. Græme, it is not a happy New Year to me unless you are satisfied with me, and care for me."

“Unless I care for you?” repeated he, steadily. “That I do, Hope, as I have told you many a time.”

“Then look at me kindly and smilingly, as you look at Tinie.”

He turned round to her. All the world seemed to grow dim—he saw nothing but the young face, lifting up such affectionately beseeching eyes, in which the great tears stood shining. He stretched out his arms to embrace her.

“Child — may I? It is New Year’s Day!”

She came, all innocently, without a demur. He folded her to his heart—closely, but softly, and with grave tenderness, as a father or a brother might do.

“God bless thee with many, many happy New Years, my darling, my innocent child! God love thee—I cannot—I dare not!”

But she only heard the blessing—nothing more.

CHAPTER III.

To the utter astonishment of everybody, the Professor, having the previous night taken farewell of the whole family, on New Year's morning reappeared at The Gowans. He seemed in a very unsettled state of mind. One minute he said he should start that night, and then he was quite uncertain whether he should go that week or the next—or any week at all. His honest face became all sorts of colours, and as he sat at breakfast his hands trembled like those of a nervous young lady. He looked round the household circle with a half-envious, and wholly disconsolate look, saying, with an expression of feeling quite new to him,

“that he was very sorry to leave them all, and he did not think he should ever be so happy as he had been with them at The Gowans.”

At last, when most of the household had flitted away in various directions, he took out of each pocket two enormous scientific-looking volumes.

“I hope you will accept this one, Græme, for the sake of auld lang syne. As to the other—if Miss Christina would continue her geological studies——”

Christina pouted, and “didn’t think she should.”

“Ah—well—it’s no matter; but I fancied she might like the book.”

Ninian saw his disappointed look, and was half vexed with Tinie for not showing more interest in her old friend and teacher. He told her to thank Kenneth Reay, and take him into the study to write her name on the gift. “A valuable gift, and valuable autograph it is, too, and my little sister ought to be very proud of it.”

But Tinie, wilful ever, went as if she were neither proud nor even pleased.

Ninian stayed a few minutes talking to Lindsay. For Our Sister, who sat doing some light sewing for her boy's benefit, looked so downcast that it was quite sad to see her.

"Come, cheer up, Lindsay. See how merry Edmund is this morning! He does not mind going at all—and is so full of hope. We must not make him dull again, must we?"

"No, no!" She pressed her eyelids back upon the mist that came between her and her work, and then her needle went on rapidly as ever.

Ninian passed into his study. The Professor sat at the table, his hands folded on the open book; but the dreary, vacant expression of his eyes showed he was not reading. Tinie stood at the window—her face flushed—beating her little fingers against the panes.

"What—have you got into a discussion,

and quarrelled? I think that sister of mine must be the most troublesome pupil you ever had. Are you not glad to get rid of her?"

"I suppose so," was poor Kenneth's answer, evidently not knowing what he said.

"Thank you. Of course you are!" Tinie replied, with a low curtsy.

"Why, what is the matter? What rude prank have you been playing, you foolish child?"

"Merely that Dr. Reay wished me to begin a—a new branch of science, which I have no inclination for just yet—and I laughed at him. That's all." She was bounding out of the room—and then, as by a second thought, came back, and held out the tips of her fingers. "Good-by, Professor, for the present. Shake hands!"

He made no attempt to do so; but with the slightest possible shade of seriousness she took his—at least just touched it, and was off out of the room.

"Kenneth," said Ninian, grasping his hand, as an almost impossible suspicion flitted

through the brother's mind. "My poor fellow, is it——?"

"Yes—that's it! I've been an old fool for a great many years. Now I must go back to my ologies."

This was the only confidence that ever passed between them.

"I think," said the Professor, after a long pause, "that I will have little time to prepare my first lecture, unless I start for London to-night."

"Then, suppose I go back with you into Edinburgh, and see you off?"

"Thank you," he replied, with an odd contortion of the mouth. "Thank you, Ninian! And," he added, hesitatingly, "if you don't mind, I would like to take the boy with me. He will be company for me, you know."

"He shall go, then," answered Ninian cordially; and went out to admonish the household, or rather Lindsay, into speedy preparation.

"I'll stay here and read. I have nothing to do—nothing!" said Kenneth, in a quiet

resignation that was sorrowful enough. But he sat with his hands on his knees, never trying to find a book; until Ninian came in, displaying a rare old copy of Laplace. In the which with brightening eyes the Professor plunged, and there buried all his tribulations.

His friend left him, and went to see after the momentous preparations on Edmund's account. For Ninian was one of those useful individuals in a house, whose aid everybody wants and nobody can do without. There were at least half a dozen voices calling upon him for cords, addresses, and keys of carpet-bags. His invaluable pair of hands were able to do anything—nor scorned to do it.

“I think we have completed everything now,” said Lindsay, as quietly, but with pale and quivering eyelids, she moved about Edmund's room; while the boy himself, excited and happy, stood by and talked to her of all his plans.

“I shall study so many hours at the college, and then during the rest of the time I shall

write. Perhaps I may soon become a real author. Would you be glad, sister?"

"Very glad. But you will promise to take care of yourself? You will not sit up late at night, or take to smoking, or any of those horrible things?"

Edmund laughed and promised—at least, with conditions.

"And you will be careful on wet mornings, and not go off to college forgetting your plaid, as you used to do here; there will not be your sister to remind you of it, you know."

And Lindsay sighed, remembering how she used to stand and watch him up the avenue—her handsome boy! with his light, quick walk, his brown curls flying, and his books under his arm. She would not do so any more now.

"Edmund," she said, with a trembling voice, "don't forget your sister—don't! You are but a youth, and she is becoming almost an old woman; but she did care for you—she did indeed! You will try to grow up a good man—will you not? You'll never let

the time come when it might grieve her to think of the days when she took care of you, and was so proud of you—her own boy !”

“But, sister, I can’t be a boy for ever and aye—Nay, you’re not crying ?”

“No, no ! I am very glad you are going, Edmund. I couldn’t expect to have you here always. I don’t even want you to think of me, if you have other things to think of. Only wherever you are, or whatever you become, remain still my good, innocent boy ! that when I see your mother in heaven she may know I did my duty by you, as I promised.”

Lindsay fell on her young brother’s neck, kissed him, and wept. Then she recovered her old quiet self, and scarcely spoke another word, or shed another tear, until Edmund went away.

He went away quite cheerfully, — boy-like ! Perhaps his farewell was rather over boastful in its composure, lest his brothers and sisters might condemn him for his weak-

ness the night before. He let no one go with him to the gate but Lindsay; so how he bade good-by to her they did not know. She came back, said a few words to the little group that stood rather ruefully by the parlour fire, and then went up into her own room until dinner-time.

It certainly was a dreary New Year's Day. Ninian had departed with the two travellers to Edinburgh. Tinie had mysteriously vanished likewise. Hope and the twins sat all afternoon, looking very disconsolate, and wondering how the house would get on without Edmund. Everybody felt it a comfort when Ninian returned. There was always something like sunshine brought in by his kindly face. He began and talked cheerily about the travellers, until he nearly banished the atmosphere of dulness that was gathering over The Gowans.

"Where's Tinie? Not come back yet?" said the elder brother, just as they were sitting down to dinner. "There will be a snow-storm directly, and it is getting so dark.

Does anybody know where that wilful lassie went out walking to-day?"

Nobody did know, not even Hope, except that Tinie had come into her room, speaking rather as if she were annoyed, and put on her bonnet and departed, refusing all company, but saying she would be back to dinner. And just as they were beginning to get uneasy, a little figure, all covered with snow-sprinklings, came running down the avenue.

"Where have you been?" said Ninian, meeting her in the hall.

"Walking, and paying calls."

"That was not right, when you knew Edmund was going away. You might have stayed to see him off."

"So I did," answered Tinie, with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes. "I went to the railway-station, just for a whim you know."

"I never saw you, child."

"To be sure not! I ran down to the further end and stood there as the train passed. I saw them, and they saw me. How Ed-

mund stared, and the Professor, too. Oh, it was such fun !”

“ Well, you are the most incomprehensible young damsel !”

“ Of course I am, but am I not also the nicest, and best, and truest little sister in the world ? Brother Ninian won’t be cross with me, will he ?” said she, in an irresistibly cajoling tone, shaking the snow off her black curls upon his hands.

Certainly, Tinie made everybody fond of her. He was not surprised at that. And he himself shared the same weakness to such a degree, that he was glad thus for the third time to have escaped losing her by marriage, supposing his dim suspicion concerning his poor friend Kenneth to be true. But he determined, unless Tinie made any confession on the subject, not to speak to her about it at all. He was really tired of lecturing, and ready to sigh with Lindsay, “ Oh, these children ! what will we do with these children !”

After dinner they made the accustomed

ring round the fireside, the missing link being closed up. With the shyness of regret that is often felt in a family circle, every one shrank from mentioning Edmund—only Lindsay, moving about with an air of slight restlessness, found one of his old exercise-papers lying on the floor; he was always such an untidy boy. They saw her pick it up and put it carefully aside, but no one said a word. However, as she returned to her seat, Hope stole quietly beside her into Edmund's accustomed place, took her hand, and held it silently but fast.

“Ah, children,” said Ninian, after a heavy pause, “I don't like changes. I can't part with any more of you. You must all just stay as you are.”

“Hope and Pussy being included!” observed Tinie, who was sitting in her usual place, only rather more subdued and thoughtful than usual; being engaged in stroking the cat, instead of teasing her.

Ninian smiled affectionately at Hope—he had seen all her tender wiles to comfort his

sister Lindsay; but he had not time to speak, before there was a loud knocking heard at the door. Tinie started up, colouring from brow to chin; while Lindsay seemed much alarmed. Everybody else took it very quietly.

There was a pompous voice in the passage. "Miss Ansted! I wish to see Miss Ansted." And the same instant the door opened.

Hope looked thither—turned as white as death—and cowered back into Lindsay's arms. "It is my father. Oh! I know it is my father."

Ninian glanced once towards her—his poor frightened bird!—and an indescribable fear oppressed him. Still, he advanced to meet the stranger. "Mr. Ansted, I believe?"

"Certainly. And I suppose you are Mr. Græme, though a good deal altered. Glad to see you, my young friend," said, with a patronisingly civil air, the—not exactly the *gentleman*, though he evidently thought himself so. "And now, sir, as I cannot see quite distinctly in this light, will you tell

me which of these young people is my daughter?"

"She is there, sitting by my eldest sister."

"Oh, indeed! Your servant, Miss Græme." And he bowed with studied politeness. "But, my daughter; I think it would be more respectful if she came to speak to me."

Hope came, moving slowly and feebly. When she passed Ninian, he felt her wildly grasp his hand, as if in a mute appeal for help—she, a child going to meet her own father! What sort of a father must he have been?

Ninian kept her hand; pressed it close to give her courage, and took her to Mr. Ansted.

"So, how d'ye do, Hope? You have grown very little in these seven years! Well, are you not glad to see me, child?"

"Yes, papa." The name came out with shyness, as though long foreign to her tongue, and forced, as if he had never taught her to utter it in the caressing way that kind fathers love.

“Come, kiss me, like a good girl. And, Mr. Græme, may I trouble you to order a light, and let me look at her. My daughter will be something worth looking at, I assure you, or ought to be.”

Ninian felt as if he could have knocked him down, the—man that was Hope’s father! But such a proceeding being quite impossible, he lighted the gas, and moved away towards his sisters.

“Is that the old—individual?” whispered Tinie. “Well! I never saw such a hor——”

“Hush!” said Ninian, trying to keep his restless eye from wandering towards his darling. She stood, evidently in violent agitation, which with all her might she tried to repress before her father. No one certainly would ever have taken her for his daughter. Not that he was by any means such a “horror of a man,” as Tinie’s prejudice inclined her to suppose. He was tolerably well-looking, and well-dressed—even overdressed. There was no decided vulgarity

either in his person or manner, except that worst of all vulgarities, a coarse mind. From his height of portly self-sufficiency he seemed to gaze complacently on all the world, as if to say, "Behold me—I am Mr. Ansted."

He looked on his daughter with eyes that betokened he was admiring her merely as *his* daughter—the child of Ralph Ansted, Esquire. He held her at arm's length—the poor trembling blushing thing—then nodded his head with a "She'll do" sort of air. At least Ninian thought so; poor Ninian, to whom his treasure seemed too sacred almost for human gaze!

"You are very like your mother, my dear; but of course you don't remember her at all. My late wife, Mr. Græme, was a most charming woman, grand-daughter to the Right Honourable Sidney Hope—we perpetuated the family name, you see. I think that, in hair and eyes, my daughter takes after me?"

Ninian made some assent and tried to converse, chiefly to attract Mr. Ansted's at-

tention from poor Hope, who, at the mention of her mother's name, trembled more than ever ; finally burst into tears, and was resigned to Lindsay.

“How very unpleasant,” said Mr. Ansted, drawing to the fire, and taking the arm-chair as a matter of course ; “but my daughter was sure to feel agitated on seeing me. Perhaps, indeed, I ought to have announced my coming ; but my various enemies, you understand——”

“Your——” creditors, Mr. Græme would have said, but paused out of delicacy, remembering he himself had been and still was one of the number,—“your difficulties, I suppose you mean?”

And he regarded his old client, somewhat puzzled to see into what a fine gentleman the runaway bankrupt had bloomed.

“My dear fellow,” said the latter, eyeing askance the rest of the Græme family, who with much tact had retired to the other end of the room, “I shall be able to arrange everything, I assure you. America is the

surest country in the world for making a speedy fortune. I should not like it mentioned here, of course, but really my property now is all that a gentleman can desire. My boys have brilliant prospects, and you must allow me to pay you handsomely for your care of my daughter. She will do my establishment great credit—great credit, indeed.”

Ninian’s heart grew like ice in his bosom. “Then, I suppose, you are now come to claim her?”

“Certainly. I have bought a mansion near London; she is quite old enough to be its mistress; in fact, she will look charming at the head of my table. I wish to take her home immediately. Suppose we send for her back and inform her of this.”

“Not yet, not yet,” said Ninian. He took thought of the child even then. “Excuse me, but Miss Ansted is a very gentle creature and much attached to my sisters; it will grieve her to leave them, I know. Do

not let her be told just yet, or let my sister Lindsay do it."

"This is quite incomprehensible," answered Mr. Ansted, with his most dignified air; "I should have thought Hope could not but be delighted to return with her father."

"You forget she has not seen you, and rarely heard from you, for seven years; nor, as I understand, was she much with you at any time. Mr. Ansted, a mere filial instinct will not counteract all these opposing circumstances."

Ninian spoke in his own honest way, but his sharpest truths were always so mixed with gentleness, that no one could be offended at them.

Mr. Ansted looked annoyed. However, he could not be very pompous before a man who knew him and his affairs so well as Ninian Græme.

"As you like. But I really hope my daughter will not turn out a troublesome,

nervous young lady, and that these strong friendships of hers will not interfere with the attention due to her father. She will find me a very kind one, I assure you."

Ninian made one of his mute affirmations, or what did duty as one. But he never could turn his tongue to the lie of politeness.

He sat and listened to Mr. Ansted's talk, which was one slow-moving wheel of harmless platitudes, circling and turning perpetually on that one great centre — himself. From thence all other conversational interests radiated. He was no fool; he had good common sense, and had seen much of the world; but wherever he was, and whatever he talked about, it was quite evident that he considered the most important person on God's earth to be Ralph Ansted, Esquire.

All this Ninian dimly perceived. He paid due attention to his companion's words; but they melted into air as soon as spoken. His sole consciousness was that the child was about to be taken from him; when, he dared not ask.

At tea, Hope came in, looking very pale, yet sweet, calm, and fair, as he seemed to have never before seen her—at least, he thought so now. He drank in her every look and movement with a greedy despair; but stealthily, trying all the while to play the kindly host—to talk and to listen, as he was bound.

Hope did in all things as he knew his right-minded, gentle darling would do. She came and sat by her father, talked to him a little, timidly enough, but as if she were anxious to please. Only once or twice, when he launched out about his beautiful house, and asked her how she would like a gay London life, she drew back, though imperceptibly to all but Ninian, and with an anxious look crept closer to Miss Græme's side.

As for Tinie, she listened to Mr. Ansted's stories of his brilliant life in America, and his numerous and celebrated London friends, with a smile of polite amusement, an occasional frown, or a gentle allusion to the renowned Baron Munchausen. It was evident that the quick-witted damsel saw through

their guest at once, and did not approve of him at all.

At length, at a late hour, Mr. Ansted thought proper to rise.

"You will stay with us to-night? we can easily accommodate you," said Ninian. He wished to show all due consideration to the father of Hope.

"No, thank you! In truth, I find no accommodation like a good hotel. One is so independent; gets such admirable breakfasts and dinners—that is, when one can pay well for them. Nothing like an hotel for me. But I shall see you to-morrow, and make better acquaintance with my daughter here. Good night, Hope."

"Good night, papa." A certain kindness in his tone brought more frankness into hers, and there was something even of confidence and pleasure in her clear eyes.

"Don't—don't look so like your mother, child," he muttered; perhaps going back to a time when his own important self had not

been quite his first object in the world. And so he went away.

After he left, they were all silent and constrained. Whatever Tinie thought or longed to say, she could not say it while Hope was by; and Hope herself seemed in a strange, half-bewildered mood. She sat by Lindsay, never speaking, but apparently absorbed in thought; or now and then looking from Miss Græme to Ninian, with a wistful, uneasy glance.

He could not bear it. To talk to the child—to meet her eyes, was beyond even *his* strength.

“Now, children, the sooner you are off to bed the better,” said he, as they lingered about in evident restraint. All gladly disappeared, except Hope, who clung to Lindsay still.

The three stood silently before the fire. At last Hope, mustering a desperate courage, said: “Mr. Græme, did you know that my father was coming?”

“I did not. I had not heard from him for months.”

“Did he say anything to you about me? Do you think he means to—that is—shall I have to go away from here?”

Her voice was broken and faint, but she struggled violently against the sorrow which she seemed to feel it wrong to show.

“Nay, Hope,” said Ninian, trying to smile. “We will not talk about these things until to-morrow. Go to sleep, and think only of what is pleasant—that my little Hope has found her father again. Moreover, she is going to turn out a grand lady.”

“That, at least, I don’t care for—not a straw. Oh, Lindsay, Lindsay! hold me fast—I can’t part with you!” sobbed the affectionate girl. Then, struck with a consciousness that this grief jarred against her new duty, she ceased, and raised herself from Miss Græme’s bosom, standing quiet and composed, though still with fast-dropping tears.

“My child—my dear Hope! she will do

what is right, I know, and so must we all. We shall know everything to-morrow," was all Ninian could find power to utter.

He knew that his strength was going, and he must fly, so he bade all good night, left his darling in Lindsay's arms, and walked with steps slow and heavy lest he should fall by the way, into his study.

If some of our close, quiet chambers, pleasant rooms we have loved, were suddenly peopled with the phantasms of our old selves as we have appeared in many an awful hour when none saw us but God,—if the dumb walls could re-utter our words—the void air revive the impress of our likeness then—what a revealing it would be! Surely we ought not to judge harshly, but each of us to have mercy upon one another.

CHAPTER IV.

“You were late last night, brother,” said Lindsay, at breakfast, on the second morning of the New Year. “I heard you come upstairs long after we did.”

“Yes ; I had work to do.”

That was true. It was the sort of work that some have to do—the toiling of spirit against flesh, which, if anything could be counted acceptable before the Most Holy, will be so counted, when, thank God ! the long day of life, with all its labour, is over for eternity.

He had weighed with himself, for the last time, every argument concerning that secret with which—for many months now—he

had been battling continually. He had considered calmly, with a mind as unbiassed as he could make it, whether his course of self-immolation was indeed *necessary*. But there the plain, common-sense truth stared him in the face, that to bring his wife into his own present household was neither more nor less than impossible. So was the other alternative, that his single toil should maintain two families.

There was still the chance of waiting. Waiting—begging from Mr. Ansted his rich heiress!—being accused of unworthy guardianship,—of stealing away a young girl's unconscious love. He was a proud man, and an honourable, was Ninian Græme. This argument but strengthened him in his firm will. Nothing ever moved him, save one thought of the child herself.

He had stood and seen Hope's tears, apparently without heeding them, but every drop had fallen on his heart like molten lead. Though, in his stern self-martyrdom, he would have been glad she did not love him,

yet, if she did, something told him that it was an awful thing for a man, on any pretext whatever, to ruin a girl's happiness for life. No fancied duty—no proud or capricious will—no self-doubting delusion—ought to disguise from him that plain truth. Some women take a love-fit—easily enough, too, sigh, weep, and “get over” it ; but Ninian felt, or, at least, conjectured, that Hope Ansted was not of these. He knew that a heart like hers, not passionate, but deep and still, once wounded, would bear the wound through life. It might not break, or it might live on, half-broken—many hearts do. But there the wrong would be. Did she love him, he held in his power a young soul of Heaven's giving, with every impulse fresh, full of dawning life that might be fulfilled in happiness and in usefulness towards God and man ; if he turned away and left it—loving it, but still leaving it—God only knew what it might become. Perhaps one day it might be required at his hands.

— Not, if he had been himself clear from

loving, or free from act or word that might have won love, but the case was not so now.

He saw that if Hope's peace were in his keeping, there was upon him a duty which transcended all duties; since for no cause, save some bar which would make such a confession sinful before heaven and earth, has a man who loves the right to close his heart against the woman that loves him.

On that night, during his solemn communings with his own conscience, Ninian had resolved that—did he see reason to believe that beneath the child's simple affection was any feeling which might be wounded with the wound he had not shrunk to deal with himself, he would at all chances tell her the whole truth, and then leave her free. He knew by his own heart, wherewith he judged hers, that did she love him, ten, fifteen, or twenty years of patient trustful betrothal would be as nothing, so that he might at last take his wife to his bosom, and

thank Heaven for his life's late-won, but most perfect crown.

" — Have you, then, sat up all night over your work?" said Hope, always full of quick sympathy for any one's little cares, especially her guardian's. "That was a pity. You should have let me help you."

For, once or twice, when he was hard-pressed, Ninian had indeed made use of her neat hand-writing for some light copying, chiefly to ease her mind, simple child! by the notion that she really was able to do a little for him who did so much for her.

"Is the work finished now?" persisted she. "Did it really keep you up half the night? Couldn't I have helped you—just a little?"

"You, child? No, no!" he said, with sorrowful meaning.

"But you'll let me do a little this morning! I am in such a working humour, and so restless besides; it will do me good to fix me to anything."

Ninian reflected that what he had to tell her concerning her departure must be told

at once; likewise, did he desire to read her innocent heart, that, too, must be read at once. And it so chanced, partly through his own firm planning, partly from the household ways, that Hope and himself were very rarely left alone. What was to be done must be done now. The opportunity might not return.

He told Hope, with a quiet, smiling manner, that he had indeed some work for her to do; and if she had an hour to spare, she might come and do it in his study—that was, if she liked.

“If I like! As if I should not like to do anything or everything for you!” cried she, hastening to obey. Tinie wanted to go also. “No, no; you’ll make me laugh, and then I shall copy badly. And I must not do anything badly that I do for Mr. Græme. You shall not come. I’ll lock the door, Tinie.”

After a merry struggle, she ran in laughing, and took her place at Ninian’s table.

“I will be with you presently,” said he,

with averted face, as he walked up-stairs. He did not come down for many minutes.

Hope was sitting rather thoughtfully. He always noticed her to grow thoughtful when she was left alone. But on his entrance she looked up with the frank smile that continually greeted him.

"I am so anxious to begin. See, I have been practising my 'lawyer's hand,' as Tinie calls it, all over the paper. I think I should really be of use to you in course of time."

While speaking, her face saddened, as if some of last night's doubts were troubling her mind. But all that morning she had never spoken of them, and scarcely even of her father. Only at times there came a restless shadow over her bright looks, which showed that, as ever, she felt a great deal more than she betrayed.

Ninian gave her her light task, and applied himself to his own, almost in silence. As he moved the papers, his hand—his strong right hand—shook like an infant's. He heard his heart's throbs, loud as though

in the whole world there had been no other sound. But Hope went on, calmly and busily writing, her long curls sweeping the paper; occasionally looking up with a pleased look that said, "See how proud I am to be so useful!"

The ever-interrupting Timie put her head in at the door:

"There you are as busy as two bees! What, did I startle away your brains, brother dear, that you look so dazed? Nay, I'll not tease you again, for I'm away down to town with Esther. Suppose I meet your papa, Hope, and bring him here?"

Hope paused and said, "Yes, I shall be glad."

"What will he say to find you working away for the dear life in this fashion? You that are to be——" And Timie's good feeling conquering her mischief caused the sentence to remain unfinished.

"I know papa would be pleased to find me doing anything for Mr. Græme," said Hope, gravely.

"Well—industry is a virtue! And if all

trades fail, you will make a capital writer's-clerk. Or what is better, a writer's wife. Should you like that, Hope?"

"I don't know. I really never thought about it," Hope answered, with a little low frank-hearted laugh.

"Then our brother shall keep a look-out for you among every young W. S. of his acquaintance. Will you not, brother?"

"Christina, you trouble me. I have business to think of," said he, in a voice so hoarse and sharpened, that Miss 'Tinie took it for "crossness" and made her speedy exit.

Hope, after one anxious look towards Mr. Græme, went on quickly with the harmless amusement she supposed was work. Many times, feeling that minute after minute was going by, and yet his words were unsaid, did Ninian struggle to speak to her, but could not. At last she spoke of her own accord.

"There, I have done one page. I wonder how long will it take me to finish the rest?"

"Are you tired of it?"

“Tired—oh no ! It is so nice sitting quiet here with you. But, I am thinking,” and she hesitated—“what time did my father say he would be here to-day?”

“He mentioned no special hour. About noon, I suppose.”

She glanced at the clock, with an expression not wholly of anticipation, but of nervous apprehension. “It is only just twelve, and papa was never very punctual; at least, when I was a child I remember hearing people say so. No, he will not be here yet.”

This was murmured half to herself, yet, being said, her quick blush seemed to accuse her of some wrong.

“I hope, Mr. Græme, you do not think, or let anybody think, that I am not glad to see my father. But I was so startled and overcome last night, and this morning his coming seems like a dream—not a reality at all. Perhaps my mind will get more settled when I see him again—he is sure to come, is he not?”

“Yes, and before he comes, there was something he told me to say to you.”

The pen fell from her hand, and in her aspect was a look amounting almost to terror. Ninian repented him of the haste with which, in a sort of desperation, he had begun to speak.

“Do not tremble—there is nothing to alarm my dear child. It is only your father’s plans regarding you.”

She trembled more than ever, but tried hard to conceal it. “No, of course I am not frightened; how should I be, at anything papa says? But tell it to me, quick—quick.”

“He wishes to take you home with him at once.”

“I thought so!” She leaned her head on the desk where she was writing—made one or two violent efforts to repress her emotion, but in vain. She said, mournfully, “I must go away, then—I must leave The Gowans, and you, and Lindsay, and them all! Oh! what will become of me!” Tears and sobs, bitter and unrestrained, burst from the affectionate young creature.

Ninian rose and came behind her chair,

lest, lifting up her face, she might by chance see his. He knew well what was written there. He knew, though he could bind his tongue as if with iron bands, and clench tightly down upon his breast the arms that longed to enfold and comfort his darling; still even *her* innocent eyes, looking on his countenance, might read what no man could wholly conceal, the tokens of so passionate a love.

“Hope, dear child, it grieves me to see you weep so much.”

It might be that there was a strange hardness in the forced words, for they made her start as if they had conveyed a reproach.

“It is very wicked—I know it is wicked all the time—but I feel as if I could not help it. However, I will try.”

And that strong sense of right—the same in her weak, girlish nature, as in Ninian’s brave heart, and which perhaps had formed the hidden sympathy that drew him to the child—made her, after one or two struggles more, rise with dry eyes, ready for all she had to hear.

He told her—leaning over her chair, and

clasping her hand which she had held out to him—all that Mr. Ansted had informed him.

“And when must I go?” said she, brokenly, though still she controlled her tears.

“He did not say; but, I should think, soon, unless we could persuade him to stay a little while in Edinburgh.”

“Oh, keep him—keep him!—if only for a few weeks, until I get accustomed to the thought of leaving you all; you, the first that ever showed kindness to me—the first that ever I learned to love.”

“Love!” How his hand, that touched hers, quivered! But he stood upright still; motionless as if he had been a bloodless statue, and not a living man. “Hope, do you, then, love—us—so much?”

“How could I help it? Are you not all so good—have you not treated me, every one of you, as though I were your own sister? And I am sure I have felt as if I were.”

“My sister, too?”

She paused a little, then said, innocently and sweetly, "Don't be angry with me, but I did not always feel exactly so with you. I was rather afraid of you at one time, you seemed so grave; but afterwards, when Lindsay and I were ill, I began to understand you, and to love you as much as I did any of them. You believe that, now?"

"Yes."

"Many a time, except that I feared you might think it rude, I have longed to asked you to let me say 'Brother,' as the rest do. It would have made me so happy to call you thus."

"Do so, then," said Ninian. His voice was very low, solemn, and cold. His joys and his fears were alike gone from him. There was no need for any struggle now.

He let the child take his hands, clasp them, and lay her hot cheek upon them, in undisguised fondness. He heard her murmur the name he had given her leave to call him. He knew he had no cause to dread her tenderness. She held him only as a brother, nothing more.

All his long, slow self-torture—all the pain he had sometimes given to the child herself—all the present's rending strife—all his resolves for the future—had been useless, baseless folly. While strength was needed, he had been strong; but now he felt all his limbs relaxing. He let go Hope's hand, and went and sat in his arm-chair.

Thither she followed him with her affectionate cares, and soft, sweet speech.

"Dear Brother,"—her lips played pleasantly with the new word,—"I know you are working too hard. I am afraid you will be ill, which will make me so unhappy!"

"Will it? That is very kind! But have no fear about me. And besides we were not talking of that now, but of your leaving us."

"I had almost forgotten it—I had, indeed! Oh, that I could forget it altogether, and stay here always!"

"You do not quite mean that. Your father——"

Poor Hope! The flood of crimson shame again arose. In a burst of contrition, she

knelt beside Ninian's chair, beseeching him to excuse what was wrong in her, and to help her to do that which was right.

He answered her—he felt very brave to answer now :

“There can be but one thing which is right to do : you must go with your father, if we loved you ever so dearly, as we do—all of us.”

“Ah ! that is so sweet to hear !” broke in her affectionate murmur.

“Still, we have no right to keep you from your father, nor, I think, would you wish us to do so.”

“No, not if it were wrong. But yet, paying him duty, I also owe some to you. If I could only fulfil both !”

“How do you mean ?”

“Oh ! if I could be spared this parting from you all—if you would persuade my father to come and live here in Edinburgh, where I should be near you, and could see you every day.”

Ninian shuddered. With the first impulse of despair that seizes every true heart

thus tried, he seemed to feel that his burden was growing more than he could bear,—that his only longing, his only hope, must be to shut out the beloved face from him for ever. He replied hastily,—so hastily, that Hope looked up in wounded surprise—

“Child, don’t think of that; it is impossible.”

She assented, blindly and patiently. No one—she least of all—was ever used to question Ninian’s will.

“I will say nothing of it then to papa; you know best. Still, it would have made me less unhappy.”

He, in his strong self-renunciation, was about to waver and yield; he would almost have laid his heart down for her feet to tread on, if it would have made the child “less unhappy;” but chance, which sometimes steps in like a merciful angel between such sacrifices and their need, came and stood in his way now.

—Not in a very angelic form, though; unless such could be personated by the portly, middle-aged likeness of Mr. Ansted. Ninian

discerned, by Hope's quick start, and the tremor which came over her, that she saw her father coming down the avenue. He trembled, too—this dumb, broken-hearted lover, who, a brief time before, had longed to put his treasure from him—anywhere, however soon, that he might escape the torture of seeing her; yet now, the chance of her being taken from him seemed to draw near like a horrible fate. Perhaps this was the last hour—the last moment—that ever he would sit here, alone with his darling, hearing her pleasant voice, receiving the tokens of an affection so unconscious, still, and pure, that sometimes, even in his worst agonies, it calmed him into content. Perhaps very soon, as she went from him, even this tie would cease—being forgotten in worldly ways, or changed into grave, womanly distantness. He never could have her as his “child” again.

His heart cried out with an exceeding bitter cry; but its yearning spent itself upon the silent air. He gazed with mad, thirsting, dumb passion on the unconscious child—on

every line of her face—every wave of her hair—as she stood by the window, watching her father approach. At length, when the loud summons told that she must go, and they would have no more speech together, Ninian's lips struggled into broken words.

“Hope,” said he, in a very low voice, “if I let you go, it is because I must. Don't change in your heart toward me; don't let the world spoil my sweet, simple child. And if this same world, which looks so different to us two, is ever hard upon you—if you want comfort, or rest, or counsel—you'll come to me, my darling!”

She threw herself into his arms of her own will, and wept there heartily and long.

Mr. Ansted's self-important voice, heard in the hall, gave her a louder warning.

“You'll go and speak to my father? I cannot—he must not see that I have been crying!”

Poor Ninian!—he that would have longed to rush away and hide himself from every presence in the wide world. But sometimes life's hardest trials are its little things.

They are most brave who can prove equal to both.

“Yes; run away and wash your poor wee eyes, dear Hope; I will go and meet your father.”

So he went and met him. Mr. Ansted’s mind was in a somewhat ruffled state; he had had an unpleasant rencontre that morning, and could not smooth his fine feathers down again.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Græme. My daughter quite well this morning? She will be here presently, I suppose?”

“Certainly.”

“You told her my intentions respecting her, of course? She will not have much time to fret about leaving, for I find I must return almost immediately.”

“Indeed!”

Mr. Ansted never seemed to notice the brief answers—all that Ninian’s tongue could speak. People that love to hear the sound of their own voices rarely quarrel with their interlocutors for being men of few words.

“I should like, if possible, to leave to-

night. My house and servants cannot well go on without me, and really I find your Edinburgh winds so confoundedly sharp, they were almost the death of me last week—did I not say I had been here since the 27th? But somehow a man in my position has so much to attend to; I positively could not get to The Gowans until last night.”

“ I am sorry,” said Ninian, absently. He was listening for the child’s step on the stairs; dreading lest she should come in, thinking how he could best tell her the abrupt news, at which he almost forgot his own pain in remembering hers. “ Are you quite sure you can stay no longer than to-night? It is very sudden for Miss Ansted. Her preparations——”

“ Must just take their chance. She can leave her wardrobe behind; it might not exactly suit the mistress of *my* house. Anyhow, she must come, for I hate Edinburgh. It is a great annoyance to speak of this, but do you know I had one or two unpleasant visitors this morning. I thought you had settled my affairs better, Mr. Græme.

After all these years, too, people are so inconsiderate."

"Mr. Ansted," said Ninian, trying to repress the vague disgust that was rising in his honest mind—"I told you that these claims ought to be satisfied some day or other. I conclude, now you have acquired a fortune, there can be no difficulty in the matter. It will be a great relief to me." And fearful visions—unjust, perhaps, but natural—rose up before him, of Hope's pure mind being first agonised, then tainted, by the lax atmosphere of a spendthrift bankrupt's home.

"Of course I intend to do all that is necessary—all that can be expected of a *gentleman*." It was curious, even comical to see how he harped upon that word. "But people in low life do not consider how indispensable are a few comforts and luxuries. However, I will sacrifice all I can. My honour—you know—my honour! Surely that is sufficient."

He said this with the frank *empresé* manner of one solicitous to gain the good opinion

of another, though not giving himself over-much trouble about the matter; which was indeed not likely in a man who had such a good opinion of himself. He had not time to explain further before his daughter came in.

“So, my young lady, it is quite a treat to look at you this morning,” said he, regarding her with evident pleasure. She was, indeed, a sweet sight—a proud sight, for any father’s eyes. Her manners,—gentle and quiet, neither expressing too much of that filial feeling which in her position could be as yet but a mere instinct, nor showing anything that could be interpreted into the want of it,—were the very perfection of what was as he probably deemed the best quality in the world, “lady-like.”

It is good when people have not all the perfections we desire, to try and give them full credit for those they really have. Ninian took comfort from the kindly way in which Mr. Ansted patted Hope’s shoulder, and the smile with which she responded to the same. He longed to see his darling made happy,

through any means or in any way. With a strong will, he rose up, leaving the father and daughter alone together.

Immediately afterwards, he thought of the tidings Hope had to hear, and how she would be grieved thereby. He would fain have rushed back to sustain her and help her to bear them. But he could not trust himself. Besides, the sort of bond by which in all her difficulties she unconsciously looked to him for strength, must be broken now. He had better leave her alone with her father. What right had he to stand between them, or mingle in their conference? Yet bitter — bitter were the writhings of that love which would fain monopolise everything, and yet could claim nothing!

He sat still, waiting until they should summon him. But at every sound he started up, his eager fears all alive, fancying he heard Mr. Ansted's angry voice, or Hope's smothered weeping; ready at any moment to rush in and snatch her,—from whom? Her father!

There was no need for aught so wild.

The child was braver than he thought. When, after a long interval, he ventured to return, Hope was sitting quite patient and composed, though without a ray of colour in her face. As Ninian came in, she said to him, in a slow, quiet voice,

“You know that I am going away to-night?”

“Yes, Hope, yes.”

Her father turned, and said, pointedly, “*Miss Ansted* will be ready in a few hours, she tells me.”

“Oh, Mr. Græme, does Lindsay know?—let me go to Lindsay,” cried the poor girl in a sort of moan, as if waking to the reality of her sorrowful departure.

Ninian followed her to the door to call his sister. When out of her father’s sight, she turned and clung to his hand with a piteous look.

“Take courage, Hope,” he whispered; “it will be over soon. Think how we love you, and how we will never forget you. And God make you happy always, my child!”

He kissed her on the forehead—a hurried,

silent kiss ; he knew it would be his last. This was the only farewell they had ; he did not see her alone again.

During those three hours, the latest Hope was to spend under his roof, Ninian sat in the parlour, dinned out of all thought, all emotion, by the perpetual flowings of Mr. Ansted's talk. There was some commotion in the house, the girls entering now and then with red eyes—women are always tender-hearted at partings. So, at least, Mr. Ansted said, making on the subject a somewhat discordant jest, which roused Tinie into the hottest indignation. But Ninian never spoke a word. He sat where without turning he could see the door move ; sometimes looking uneasily that way, as his sisters entered and departed. Hope only never came.

At last, when her father's restless inquiries about "Miss Ansted"—a new sound in that house—were growing more impatient than ever, she appeared. Great lamentations there were around her, for she had in truth been loved dearly by all the sisters, and these

tender, girlish hearts were yet sore from the parting with Edmund.

Hope stood, perfectly quiet and resigned, with the large, silent tears rolling down her cheeks. She kissed every one round, from Lindsay down even to Reuben and Charlie, who were both so sorry to lose her that they did not resist the indignity at all. Ninian was not present. He only came to the carriage door in time to shake her by the hand. She held his fast.

"You'll not leave me here—you'll come with us to the railway?"

"Really, my dear," interposed her father, "we cannot inconvenience Mr. Græme so far, and I must call at my hotel on the way. All *adieux* had much better be ended here."

Hope obeyed without a word; indeed, she could not speak, not even to say good-by.

Ninian pressed her hand, and let it go. She sank back in the carriage, and he saw his darling's sweet face no more.

CHAPTER V.

It was full summer once more at The Gowans—the house of all others where summer had full opportunity of display, for Mr. Græme's garden was decidedly the bonniest garden in and about Edinburgh. He took much pride in it, which people said was a forewarning of old bachelorhood. Ninian met their jest—as thousands of such jests are met—with the smile that covers everything. It would have taken a very keen eye to see—what good-natured friends unluckily seldom do see—that in most cases this sort of idle banter must necessarily send chance arrows into many a hidden wound.

Ninian was taking his evening stroll round

his beloved garden, making acquaintance with every new rosebud that had been born that day—Tinie declared he certainly counted his flowers, and knew them by heart ; or now and then listening to some stray mavis which had taken up its abode in the great walnut-tree. Miss Græme came up to him, her pale face flushed, even her neat dress scarcely so neat as ordinary. She was evidently in that pleasant state of excited activity when people are quite oblivious of their outward appearance.

“ Oh, Ninian ! this has been a busy day ! I wonder you can bear to daunder about so quietly—though, to be sure, you have done as much as any of us. And I fancied you looked pale. Yes ! it was right for you to take a little rest and fresh air.”

Ninian slightly turned aside a face whereon were written many conflicting thoughts, that his sister could not and must not read. But for once in her life Lindsay was too busy even to notice her brother.

“ — Are you quite sure there will be flowers enough for Monday, especially white

roses. Hope's tree is in full bloom, I see. Dear little Hope! I wonder if she will come. What do you think?"

"That—if her father allows her—she certainly will. Her last letter showed how anxious she was to be with us at this time."

"Dear child! I knew she would!" said Lindsay, from whose fond remembrance her favourite was never long absent. "To be sure she was scarcely such friends with the twins as she was with Tinie—still, she liked them very much; and she always used to say that she should dearly love to come to the first wedding in the family."

This was, indeed, the grand event that was "casting its shadow before," to-night at The Gowans. So much change had six months brought. Esther and Ruth, being of those quiet sort of girls who never weary their friends with getting into love-troubles—whose wooings and marryings nobody ever seems to contemplate, but who bide their time, and then astonish everybody by a wedding, after which they turn out the best wives and mothers imaginable—the

twins were actually going to be married! and, moreover, to be married both at once!

Kindly fate had stepped in and solved the grand difficulty—the parting between two sisters so linked together in right of birth and affection. Two worthy brothers, wanting wives, had accidentally made a descent upon the doves' nest at The Gowans; the result of which was that William and Patrick Fraser carried off Ruth and Esther Græme. All was done in the most commonplace and straightforward way imaginable. Three months' coming to tea once a week—a walk or two round the Calton Hill—an interview with the elder brother—Esther and Ruth called into the study, and coming out with dim eyes, but smiling—a three months' engagement, and a wedding!

Therefore it was that Lindsay was so busy, so innocently important—therefore it was that Ninian walked in his garden, pondering over many things.

“I wonder,” repeated Lindsay, in her restless anxiety—“I wonder, will that dear child really come? She could not be here until the

last minute, perhaps the latest train to-night, and there is no chance of her staying more than a day. Her father would not let her. Still, only one day's sight of her bonnie face will be something, will it not, Ninian?"

He said simply "Yes!" Yet on the chance of that brief day he had been living week by week, hour by hour, for the last three months. By the light of the new hopes which time had faintly let in upon his life, he wished after this half year's severance to read in Hope Ansted's manner some token unto which to cling in his future, or to judge faintly of hers.

"I almost think that is the postman at the gate. If she does not come, she would of course have written."

"This is no London letter, it is past the time," said Ninian. He knew the hour well—he had counted it by many a heart-beat.

"How wearisome. Still there might be a letter lying at your office; she often directs hers there. I wish you would go and see."

He went gladly. He felt a miserable restlessness that would not suffer him to keep

still anywhere. When he came to the little room—where his clients sat and listened to the strong clear sense and acute worldly wisdom of the much-trusted Mr. Ninian Græme—he eagerly turned over his heap of letters. The dainty small hand, so pleasant to his eyes, was there.

She would not come, then !

— For the first time in his life, he sat with one of Hope's letters unopened ; for the first time, the receiving of such had brought less pleasure than pain. He had so built his heart upon her coming.

The letter was for himself, as, indeed, she usually addressed, saying it was meet that her heterogeneous family epistles should be directed outside to the Head of the Family. He opened and read :

“ ‘ Dear brother,’ as I delight to say now,—it almost breaks my heart to think I cannot come. I have waited until the last moment, but papa is unwilling, and says he cannot spare me. Perhaps, if I were very, very selfish and importunate, I might over-

come his objections, but I think that would not be right. And you always taught me, not only in your words but in your actions, to do right first, and please oneself afterwards. Therefore you will forgive your little Hope, and tell dear Lindsay and the rest to forgive me too, knowing how all my heart and thoughts will be with you on Monday.

“Papa has only just told me his mind; therefore I have no time to write to any than yourself to-day, but I will not forget to do so to-morrow.

“Ah! dear Mr. Græme, if I could but follow where this letter is going!

“Ever your affectionate,

“HOPE ANSTED.”

Ninian finished the letter, half sighing, yet his spirit was comforted. He discerned all the quiet self-denial of the heart he loved; he knew it was still tender, pure, and undefiled from the world. He looked fondly at Hope's letter, and placed it with another that he carried about with him—the last of a goodly number which he had in his desk at

home. Therein there was a certain change from the first simple childish epistle he had received from her, but all breathed the same frank affection and innate simplicity. He need not fear that the prosperous worldly life, which, according to Edmund's account, Miss Ansted was leading, had clouded the sweet innocence of his darling.

"One of our travellers will not be here," said Ninian, as he returned home, and put Hope's letter into Lindsay's hands. "Nay, don't look so disappointed: to-night's last train will at least bring us somebody. We must not forget our Edmund."

And in due time Edmund came, causing the twin-brides to be no longer the most important personages in the household.

"I declare he has grown enormously, in inches and moustache," cried Tinie, dancing round him admiringly. "He turns up his collars, patronises studs and a cane, and—faugh—Edmund, you actually smoke!"

Edmund turned on his heel. He was, at all events, not grown into sufficient manhood to be proof against Tinie's quizzing.

"Certainly, London works wonders. If six months there has produced such a change in you, what results has it effected in the Professor?"

"None, I suppose; I see very little of him. He reads from morning till night and from night till morning, and seems duller and quieter than ever. Miss Reay says, as usual, that he is 'killing himself,' and, by his looks, I shouldn't wonder if he were."

"How very comical!" Having said this, Tinie relapsed into silence, and teased her brother no more.

Strange to say, it was some time before anybody inquired particularly about Hope; and yet not strange, since to none save one did she hold the nearest place. But it was long before Ninian could put the simple question—

"When did you see Hope Ansted?"

"Ay, tell us about dear little Hope!" said Lindsay, rousing herself from that absorbed state of quiet happiness where she sat, doing nothing, but listening to and gazing upon her handsome boy.

“Hope is grown a lovely creature—a most elegant girl. Even Mr. Ulverston acknowledges that; and his taste in female beauty is very fastidious. However, she is rather too *petite* for my liking.”

The careless young-man-of-fashion air with which Edmund said this, made Lindsay look amazed, and sent Tinie into one of her heartiest fits of laughter.

“So my wise brother is turning connoisseur in feminine perfections, with Mr. Ulverston as his tutor. Nice master—nice pupil. And I suppose you took him to Chester-terrace, that poor little Hope might be ‘trotted out’ for him, in her new character?”

“No such thing! He never saw her until last week, when the Ansteds were dining at Dr. Reay’s with Mr. Ulverston and his cousin Sir Peter—a poor old creature who has a title, but not a shilling, and whom our Mr. Ulverston maintains altogether—generous fellow that he is.”

“Here’s news! A Sir Peter Ulverston! It sounds well. And I dare say Mr. Ansted thought so?” said Tinie, wickedly.

“ I don’t know—I only know that I had to go and dine there with him, and so missed the first two acts of a new play written by a friend of mine.”

“ Bravo, Edmund, your acquaintance is extensive, reaching from baronets to dramatic authors. What sketches of London life we will have from you.”

“ Ah! it is indeed a grand life—a delicious life!” cried Edmund, with sparkling eye. And as his first affectation of manner wore off, he began to detail with spirit the various excitements of the new world, opened up to him in consequence of his living at the house of a well-known man of science, and visiting at that of a rich dabbler in literature like Mr. Ulverston. It was the life of all others most dazzling to a young and impressible mind—a mingling of the delights of sense and of intellect—mere sensual pleasures appearing refined by the medium through which they were communicated, like intoxicating wine poured from a graceful vase. Edmund, with his sisters gathered round him, dilated long and proudly on all these things.

And Lindsay, watching him, only saw that her boy was happy. She desired no more.

But though they all talked fast, and loud, and long, there was scarcely another question put regarding Hope. Six months' new interests creep so fast over the most affectionate of young hearts. Even by the fireside where she had sat so long, none seemed to miss her, or to think of her—save one. And Ninian, apart in his quiet corner, listened in vain for the name which alone he cared to hear, but which alone he could not take courage to speak.

Sunday morning came, and the grave looks of all the household brought to each the reality that it would be the last Sunday—in fact the last day when they should ever meet together as *one* household. It is a solemn thing ever—the first marriage in a family—the first unloosing of that bond which will never be knitted up again on this side the grave. Ninian—as he sat at breakfast-table, which, with Edmund's place now filled, looked just as it had looked every Sunday morning for so long—felt a strange

heaviness at his heart. Everybody was silent and serious; even the two young brides, not usually given to strong sympathies—especially family sympathies—had a downcast, tearful look. And when Ninian, rising with his customary, “Now, children, get ready for church,” faltered a little, apparently with the thought that he never would call the whole band by the one loving name of “children” any more, there was a general giving way. Though the elder brother, according to his wont, tried to make jests out of melancholy, for the sake of brightening up the rest—still while he smiled his eyes were dim. When he said, “God bless us all, and make us one day a happy family, in a place where there are no weddings to cry over,” and immediately afterwards sent them all away to dress—everybody knew that it was because his brotherly heart was so full, that he must needs be alone.

He walked to church that day between his twin-sisters, leaving Lindsay to Edmund’s care. Very quiet was that walk, along the road trodden Sunday after Sunday by the

little family band—a pleasant road, ever and anon affording glimpses of the broad, bright Frith, and of the opposite hills of Fife. And, as they left the sunshine and entered the dark church, very solemn sounded the hymn which they all sang, sitting together, for the last time, in the same pew where they had come as little children, and had sat year after year, until they grew up into men and women, a goodly line of worshippers. Ninian, in his place next the pew-door, leaned his hand over his eyes. He was thinking of the day when he should meet his father at the gate of heaven, and say—in words that came not irreverently to his reverent mind, “Here am I, with the children thou didst give unto me.” He thought likewise, how sweet it would be to say, “Of all that thou gavest me I have lost none.”

The Sunday passed slowly away. Oh, how happy were those summer Sundays at The Gowans! The quiet hour between sermons spent in cheerful talk by the open windows, or in strolls about the garden;

the second service; and then the closing in of the Sabbath-evening, kept as all Scottish Sabbaths are—when the family retires into itself, with the certainty that no visitors from without will break upon its leisure and rest.

“I think,” said Edmund, as he sat on the grass at Lindsay’s feet, under the boughs of the great walnut-tree—“I think, if anything would keep us all good, it would be to remember these quiet Sundays at home. I wish, I wish——”

But the boy’s aspiration—earnest and sad as his look testified—was broken in upon by unpleasant news.

“Oh, what will become of our wedding to-morrow?” cried Tinie, coming from the house; “Dr. Muir has just sent word he cannot be here, and where will we get another minister?”

This was, indeed, a perplexity, but one out of which was evolved the thing which Lindsay most earnestly desired.

“I wonder,” said Ninian, after a long family consultation, “would John Forsyth

come? I would have asked him long ago, but he has grown so strange to us of late, since he took to his wandering life. I do not even know if he is in Edinburgh."

"That he is," put in Charlie, who was one of those restless lads who seem to know everything that goes on everywhere; "he holds a field-preaching to-night on Bruntsfield Links."

"Come, Edmund, then there is no time to be lost. Let us go."

Edmund, who, despite his passing Sabbathic feelings expended at his sister's feet, had turned and slightly compromised the sanctity of Sunday evening by smoking a cigar over the rose-beds, obeyed with some reluctance. Nevertheless, he did obey, and the two brothers disappeared down the avenue, arm-in-arm.

They were a strong contrast. The firm, world-tried man, in whose face every year, nay, every month, the hard lines were deepening—lines of passion, struggle, and endurance, indicating, though scarcely betraying, that hard battle of which few are

ignorant who have lived past thirty years;—and the slender, beautiful youth. For Edmund was beautiful; he had about him that rare charm which nature gives only to women and poets—a sort of ideal grace, delicate yet not effeminate, since it belongs to no sex. It is, in fact, only a foreshadowing of the angelic likeness which we believe we shall all one day wear, when the body ceases to be the tight swaddling-clothes of the half-developed soul, and becomes the fair, pliant garment which enrobes without concealing its full beauties.

It was late in the evening when the brothers reached Bruntsfield Links. The shoulders of the great lion of Arthur's Seat were tipped with the last gold of sunset, but along the Links it was quite twilight. However, at the end nearest Heriot's Hospital and the Old Town, they could distinguish a black mass of thronged people, the edges of the mass becoming scattered and thin, like the outer verge of a nebula. It was the field-preaching.

“I think we are right—that is surely

John Forsyth's voice," said Ninian, as they approached the crowd, the outer ring of which was composed of half-curious, half-inattentive auditors ; sometimes playing, sometimes listening, according as fragmentary words and sentences reached them from the preaching within the circle.

It was, indeed, John Forsyth's voice—once so youthful, so musical—the same which had echoed above the vast congregation in the old kirk. Its tones had now grown somewhat harsh and coarse with open-air speaking; loud with the vehemence—almost rant—which is the besetting sin of most Scottish ministers. Yet still, despite the comical elements that mingled in the scene,—though the preacher preached from a barrel, and the motley, uncouth groups around him bore a similitude to that marvellous Wedding-feast, whereto were gathered the lame, the halt, and the blind—still the fierce earnestness of the declamation, and the utter silence of the people that listened, threw solemnity over all.

Ninian pressed slowly through the close-

wedged crowd, until he was near enough to catch the discourse and see the countenance of his old friend. Both words and look were full of a wild inspiration. Yet the sermon was unlike those he used to preach ; the softness and refinement of his eloquence was changed into a plain, rugged speech, suitable for those who were now his audience. At times, even when his own mind led him towards a classic sublimity of language, he would pause and re-translate it into homeliness. Something, too, in the matter as well as manner of his speech was different. The doctrine of love was merging into the doctrine of fear. He was less the tender shepherd, softly calling his sheep into the fold, than the threatening pastor, who would fain drive them in thither whether they chose to go or not.

Yet still this man, standing bareheaded on God's earth, beneath God's heaven, admonishing the people that as there was an earth, so surely was there a heaven and a hell,—could not but impress all with the reality of the great truths he preached

concerning life, death, and eternity. And when, with the sudden change which the vehemence of such preaching allows, he changed his sermon into prayer—or rather, into an appeal to the Invisible that what he said was true—a cry unto the Omnipotent to make his words strike like arrows into the hearts of his hearers—then, with a sudden impulse and involuntary awe the people all unbonneted, or stood covering their eyes in the attitude of Presbyterian devotion. It was worship in its blindest, rudest form—or so it would have seemed to a Church-of-England congregation; but still it was worship—in many, doubtless, sincere.

And when—some self-constituted presenter having led the psalm—the grand Old Hundredth—

“All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,”

John Forsyth gave it out couplet by couplet;—and as the echo of his single voice ceased, it was taken up at first faintly and discordantly, until gradually the rude congregation joined,

and sent up their great cry into the quiet sky, where a few stars were just peeping—truly, it was a grand and solemn scene!

Then came a pause; the young minister's blessing being almost inaudible, and in the thick-coming darkness nothing being distinguishable save a dim figure with outstretched arms. The worship was over. John Forsyth stepped, or rather staggered from the barrel which had been his pulpit, into a chair brought by some kindly devotee; the two constituting the only articles of church-furniture required in this temple.

Slowly the multitude began to spread itself, blackening the wide Links; and save for a few stragglers that lingered either out of reverence or curiosity, the minister was left alone. He sat, leaning his covered face upon the back of his chair, in a state of utter exhaustion. The few remnants of his audience looked at him, and passed by. He seemed no prophet, only an ordinary man, now.

Ninian Græme, seeing that after this violent exertion the young man was shivering in the damp night air, took off his own plaid and put it over him.

“Don’t start so, John ; it is only I. You did not think I had been among your hearers ?”

John Forsyth muttered some reply ; but he was very much exhausted.

“We came to meet you here—my brother and I;—this is my brother Edmund, just come home.”

The young minister held out his hand, looked at Edmund, and turned hastily away. Then Ninian remembered how fond Rachel had been of the boy, who had used to visit continually at the house at Musselburgh. He told his brother to proceed towards The Gowans, lest Lindsay might be growing anxious.

“I have come to ask something of you, John,” said Ninian, as they walked across the Links, his friend leaning heavily on his arm. “I would not ask you before, lest you might not like it ; but this is a case of emer-

gency. You know I am going to lose my twin-sisters."

"Dying? Well, so much the better for them—as for us all. Must I come and pray over them?"

"God forbid! at least, not in that way. No; I meant that they are going to be married. And I want you, my old friend, to come and give them the marriage blessing."

"Blessings—and marriages! I have to do with none of these things. You forget what I told you of my chosen life—how that I go, like my Master, among publicans and sinners; wherever there is misery, evil, or death. As for this marriage, don't ask me, Ninian. A blessing coming from me would be no blessing at all."

But Ninian soothed and argued with him; contesting with what seemed the two prevailing feelings now rooted in Forsyth's mind—his sense of unworthiness and self-abasement, and the bitter asceticism which made him turn from the sight of everything like worldly happiness.

“But it will not be all happiness with us to-morrow. It is a sorrowful parting with our Ruth and Esther. Lindsay feels it much, I know. And do you remember the last marriage that was to have been in our house, twelve years ago, when you were quite a boy, and I little more—how we two were to have been best-men to your cousin?”

“When God took poor Archibald, that is, *happy* Archibald! Oh! Ninian, I wish I were with my cousin now, or had gone with him when I was a boy,” sighed John Forsyth; and, in the star-light, a softened grief crossed his face—a grief that seemed almost welcome, tempering its stern repose.

“My sister Lindsay wants you to come. Perhaps you might do her good, you know.”

“Your sister?” repeated the young minister, pursuing the current of his thoughts. “Ah, I remember as though it were yesterday, how Archibald lay dying up in the hills, with the congregation all round him, though he had no near friend by except me, a mere boy. He could hardly speak for the blood choking his lungs, but I heard him say one word, and

that was 'Lindsay.' Yes! if Lindsay wishes, I must indeed come to-morrow."

And so he gave the promise Ninian wished. They walked together into Edinburgh, parting on the bridge that overlooks the Cowgate.

"Are you not going home, John?"

"Not for many hours yet. I keep my Sabbath-night as the Apostles did, going from house to house. But if you were to see the houses I go to—the Sabbath-night scene. If you only knew what a hell upon earth may be found in some places there!"

He looked down towards the Old Town, and strong disgust was visible on his delicate features, which indicated a nature of almost womanly refinement.

"Why do you go?" was the question that rose to Ninian's lips, but was unspoken. He knew its answer well. And while he watched his friend, he saw how the look of disgust passed, and was sublimed into an aspect strong enough to daunt the wicked, holy enough to sustain the weak. He knew that the young man was fitted to be one of those servants whose service is to go out in the

highways and hedges, and compel souls to come in.

“God bless you, John Forsyth,” said Ninian, grasping his friend’s hand. “Your lot is not light, nor mine either, but we will both be grey-headed men some time, and then we shall know our trials were all for good.”

So they parted, the young missionary disappearing down the nearest wynd, while Ninian Græme passed on, and went his way.

CHAPTER VI.

IF one can once put aside the feeling, indigenous to the consciences of the southern half of this island, that no vow is thoroughly consecrated unless made in a consecrated building—there is something very touching, home-like, and beautiful in a Scottish marriage, which converts the household-hearth into an altar where the bride and bridegroom plight their troth, quietly and solemnly, in the midst of their own people. This sudden changing of the family-room, into a temple, of the family group into a circle of reverent worshippers, is not without its sanctity—perhaps deeper than the custom which brings the whirl of carriages and the

stares of church-door crowds as necessary adjuncts upon the solemnities of such a time. But either form may be viewed from either side, and outward show signifies little, so that the marriage-vow be taken truly and worthily—not only in the sight of man, but of God.

In the parlour of The Gowans,—Ninian would never have it called “the drawing-room,” because its furnishings were so plain,—in that simple room was gathered the first wedding party which had ever stood beneath the roof of the Grames. It consisted solely of their own family, except Mrs. Forsyth, who came with her son—and the father and mother of the two Frasers. Well-pleased, gallant-looking bridegrooms they were, while the twin-sisters were bonnie brides. Each and all were of the good, comely, easy-going race of ordinary men and women, who are born, marry, and die—live a contented harmless life—help to people the earth, and then leave their quiet dust in its bosom, having done all they can, and no more. Perhaps these

are the happiest people of all, in this world at least !

The marriage was simple—not splendid—so Ninian had desired. He did not think it right or needful that his sisters, going portionless from his roof to another not above their own sphere, should make any display in dress. All were in plain white—the proper wedding garment; even Lindsay assumed it for once, though her worn face and thin figure made her look in it more like a shrouded nun than a bridal guest. But her determination lay between this and her customary black dress; and, for once, no arguments could move her.

So, all white-stoled together, his four sisters stood before Ninian's eyes. A few minutes more—and he had given two of the number from out of his keeping for ever. He did it—rather sadly—and yet with content, for he had fulfilled his duty by them, at last bestowing them worthily, and according to their hearts' desire. Only when, having kissed them with a brotherly tenderness, he resigned them to a nearer claim,—he felt

glad to have his little Tinie drawing close to him with a loving, wilful face that said, "For me, I won't go away, and nothing shall make me!"

The marriage was over. John Forsyth had made the service as brief as he could, with little or no exhortations. These things were not his portion. He was, or wished to be, wholly absorbed in his apostleship. From his look, it seemed as if a lifetime had swept by him since he had been the young man who, tossed by agonising passion, had come and said to Ninian, "It is all over now!" Brief and fierce had been the trial—utter and complete its closing! He would never know the same, or anything like it, henceforth. He was a minister in God's service, devoted wholly and for evermore.

After he had closed the ceremony, John Forsyth went aside and talked with Lindsay. Their speech lasted a long time. It might have been, most likely it was, concerning that Kingdom where there are neither marriage nor death; neither struggle, tempta-

tion, nor loss. And to that Kingdom, beyond and above all hindrances, they two were now bound.

We hear it, we read it written, though in youth we cannot, will not believe it,—that even in the most perfect human love is no continual rest ; that if we had it, we should not be satisfied therewith ; that nothing can satisfy the soul's desiring—except God. *He can*, they say—they, the wisest and holiest among us, while we, in our bitter youth, are often very unwise and very unholy. Still, let us believe this truth. Oh, ye suffering ones who read this page—and many such must read it, for the world is full of woe—have patience ! If we could once get a clear sight into that Kingdom afar off, everything near in this world would crumble into ashes. It would not signify whether we had trod lonely through thorns, or been led softly amidst pleasant places, when our eyes were once fixed, firmly and eternally, *there*. And such a blissful ending is possible, ay, and must be, or the just God is unjust, and has let us suffer in vain. Oh, my

brethren—oh, my sisters—let us have patience and believe !

It may be that John Forsyth and Lindsay Græme were the most to be envied of all the group—in whom this marriage had stirred up many secret troubles, as every marriage must. After its close, when the two young couples were departed, all the party wandered about the house in a most unsettled state, trying to make the day move on like any other day, but quite unable to beguile themselves into such a state of composure.

“You’ll not go away, John ? It is not often we have a talk together, old friend !” said Ninian, linking his arm in that of Forsyth, and walking with him up and down the little avenue. It was good for both, this long converse together, since Ninian himself was in no quiet mood. During all the marriage service he had seen, as in a dream, a little figure, in bridal white, with long falling curls and sweet eyes, to whom he said no longer “my child,” but “my wife.” And the intense longing which this dream brought, warned him that it had

need be repressed, or he would never have strength to battle with the years that must pass before it could become reality.

He talked to John Forsyth about the things which now filled up the sole interest of the young man's existence. He led him to unfold his wanderings during the last few months. They extended over Scotland and the north of England—in cities, towns, villages—everywhere that there seemed opportunity for a preacher, or where there was a chance of his being listened to.

“ Sometimes they will not listen—they hoot me, pelt me with stones—an olden persecution, which seems almost sanctified—I try to rejoice in all. And again sometimes circumstances chance that make me feel my labour is not altogether in vain. One happened not long ago.”

“ Tell me of it.”

“ I was near Durham, about to preach in the open air; it is hard to do that in England, for they call one Ranter and Methodist, and Latter-day Saint; they never could understand why a Scottish Kirk-minister should

so demean himself as to worship God beneath no roof but his own sky. What scorn and reviling I have had! But I take all, and glory in all."

"But what of this particular preaching you mentioned?" said Ninian, trembling to see the religious zeal, almost amounting to religious madness, which glittered in the eyes of the young enthusiast.

"The sermon was partly for warning, partly for charity,—to get help for the families of some wretches who had perished in a coal-mine. This time I wanted to have hearers among the rich as well as the poor. But people mocked me, for there had come a troop of actors into Durham, and plays were pleasanter and more amusing than preachings. So I thought I would fight with Satan in his stronghold. I wrote to the theatre-company, dwelling on all those awful truths which a minister of God should never spare, calling upon them to come and hear me, if by any means they might be snatched as brands from the burning."

Ninian looked grave; his calmer mind

did not quite coincide with the ultra-fanaticism of his friend. But he was too wise to argue, so he only asked "What came of this adventure?"

"It touched the heart of some poor Magdalen in Jezebel guise; there came an anonymous answer, enclosing money for me to use or to expend in charity. There has come more since, addressed to me in Edinburgh; so the impression was not merely momentary. You may see here," said he, taking a letter out of his pocket; "the poor sinner asks that 'John Forsyth will remember her in his prayers.' So I will, God knows."

Mr. Græme looked at the paper; the writing was large, uncertain, coarse—either from the emotion of the writer, or her wish to disguise her hand. Yet something in it struck him as if he had seen it before. But he had no time to consider the matter, for while John Forsyth was yet speaking, Nini-an's attention was fixed by a carriage at the gate. Could it, indeed, be—— Oh! strange weakness of human love, that at any moment conjures up the possibility it most desires!

No—it was not “the child.” There was no need for him to spring to the gate with such rapidity. He only met there the very last person he was thinking of—Mr. Ulverston.

“You will imagine I always appear unexpectedly,” said the latter, with his gay air; “to be sure, I am a most restless, ubiquitous individual in my comings and goings. But, tell me, am I welcome?” added he, with the charming, frank effrontery that seems to run in the current of Hibernian blood; and, by advantage of which, Mr. Ulverston could do and say almost anything.

“Welcome? Yes!” answered Ninian, perhaps himself succumbing to the attractive powers of this young man—perhaps, with the quick concatenation of ideas, reflecting that Mr. Ulverston came from London, visited at Chester-terrace, and might bring tidings which were enough to make the most repulsive person welcome unto Ninian Græme.

“I am too late to be a wedding-guest, I fear; and yet I have travelled post-haste, in order to succeed in my mission. It is to

bring a present to your two fair brides from our sweet little friend, Miss Ansted."

"Thank you. It was a long journey."

"Oh, nothing! I would do twice as much to pleasure a fair lady—especially when one sees the tears in her eyes, as I did on Saturday night—when, by some delay or other, she found her pretty present was sure to be too late. So I volunteered to act as messenger—the fair one accepted my offer—and here I am with my jewels. But where are the brides? Gone? She will be so disappointed, poor little Hope!"

Ninian started. He could not bear to hear her Christian name on a stranger's lips. But in a little while he remembered that it was only Mr. Ulverston's careless, familiar manner of speaking of all women.

"I am sorry," he said. "It is very kind of Miss Ansted, and likewise of you. Our brides have left us some hours since; but will you come in and see my sisters, Lindsay and—Tinie?" Uttering the latter name, Ninian could not forbear a close scrutiny of Mr. Ulverston—who, however, appeared perfectly unconcerned.

“Then she has not disappeared behind the clouds of matrimony, my fair ‘Cynthia of the minute,’ as we used to say at the Gare-Loch. It will be quite a pleasure to have another laugh with the blithe Miss Tinie. And I have a long message to deliver to her from her friend. Then, may I go at once to claim Miss Græme’s hospitality?—that is, if you will take me in, for I must return to London to-morrow.”

The sedate Ninian was fairly puzzled by the mercurial temperament of this gentleman, who could travel some 900 miles there and back to please a fancy of one young girl, or, perhaps—as his brotherly caution whispered—to flirt a little more with another. But there seemed no harm in the man—only volatility. Mr. Græme set the question by as beyond his own comprehension, and merely tried to fulfil the duties of kindness towards one who evidently took so much pains to please.

“Come! my sisters will be glad of a guest to drive their dulness away. Suppose we all return to the house together.” And

Ninian remembered his friend, who had stood apart during this new arrival. "Mr. Ulverston—Mr. John Forsyth. You may recollect walking with me one day to the house of Mrs. Forsyth, at Musselburgh."

"Musselburgh!" Mr. Ulverston slightly knitted his brows. "Oh, yes! a curious old town at first sight. But I have no further acquaintance with it."

He looked at John Forsyth, and John Forsyth at him. The two men seemed to scan one another narrowly, with some vague interest for which they probably would have been unable to account. Instinctively both appeared to discern the fact that in every way their two characters were dissimilar, and their lives as wide asunder as the poles. They merely bowed, and took no further notice of each other.

Tinie and her former swain met—as such light lovers were sure to meet—without the least shade of embarrassment on either side; and resumed their old badinage with infinite gratification. Edmund, too, whom London society had smitten with the new desire to

cultivate his wit, said such sparkling things that Lindsay marvelled at the brilliancy of her boy. They were a merrier party than could have been expected for that most dolorous time to the bride's family, the closing of a wedding-day.

The presents were displayed—a few ornaments, good of their kind, but simple—valuable as tokens of remembrance, nothing more.

“I thought they would have been much richer jewellery than this,” observed Ulverston, unable to restrain his surprise. “Such a wealthy man 'as Mr. Ansted seems—his house so well appointed! Your friend is looked upon as an heiress, I assure you. This is quite extraordinary.”

“Not at all,” said Ninian. “Miss Ansted knew my sisters would have no use for rich ornaments. She has judged rightly, as she always does.”

“Certainly. A young head, to have so much sense in it ;—too great sense almost for so lovely a woman,” was Mr. Ulverston's half-sarcastic reply. For which Miss

Christina took him to task in a bantering argument that lasted a quarter of an hour.

Mrs. Forsyth, somewhat scandalised by the light manners of young people of modern days, rose, with her son, to take leave.

“ I had forgotten the letter you gave me, John,” Ninian said, with some feeling of compunction for the manner his own sympathies had passed away concerning the same. “ If it is no secret, let me tell Lindsay the story before you go.”

He did so, and all listened, even Mr. Ulverston, who was the only one to comment, with the slight sneer into which his gaiety sometimes merged ;—

“ A very wonderful, almost incredible piece of generosity in an actress. They are generally either improvident or avaricious—a worthless set, as I tell Edmund here, when he attacks me with his dramatic mania. Most of these stage-goddesses are of very inferior clay—low-born, only half-educated. That epistle seems addressed in a wretched scrawl,” added he, rising to hand it from

Lindsay to Mr. Forsyth, and carelessly glancing at it the while. But in so doing his eye grew fixed; his smiling face darkened.

"May I look at the *billet-doux* of this your anonymous correspondent, Mr. Forsyth?" said he, with a forced laugh.

"And I, too," cried Tinie, peeping over the guest's shoulder. "'*From a wronged Sinner*,'—quite a paradox! But how deliciously romantic!—do you not think so, Mr. Ulverston?"

"Absurd! Some foolish story or other, to take in credulous people," answered the young man, with an anger rather discourteous. And his white, ringed fingers grasped the paper as if he wished to tear it in pieces.

"Here's a novelty! Mr. Ulverston in a passion!"

"I could almost be so, to see how easily deceived are benevolent, amiable folk like your fair ladyship," was the answer, with a gracious bow and smile, which marked the evaporation of his momentary annoyance. "But I—who, unluckily for myself, know more of the world than does Mr. Forsyth,

or than your excellent sister there—would strongly advise you not to pursue this interesting heroine any further.”

“You seem greatly to dislike her indeed. She might be an enemy—or, perhaps, an acquaintance of yours? Possibly you recognise the hand?” said the mischievous Tinie.

This time Mr. Ulverston crimsoned with real indignation.

“My acquaintance does not lie among such people,” said he, haughtily. “I merely wished to warn my friends against bestowing interest and compassion upon impostors—I say again, impostors.”

“Now, that is making mountains of mole-hills. Listen!” added she, appealing to the rest. “Here is Mr. Ulverston’s definition of the term impostor:—a woman who sends money for charity, in such a way that it is impossible to find out anything about her, except from the widely-inclusive signature of ‘A Sinner!’”

“A *wronged* ‘sinner!’” added Ninian, who, without paying much attention to the con-

versation, had taken up the letter which Mr. Ulverston had angrily thrown aside. As he examined it attentively, a light flashed across his mind, vivid enough to make him oblivious of all the talking kept up around him.

Could it be possible that this letter came from the lost Rachel? He had scarcely ever seen her hand-writing, for, with a consciousness of that inferiority which frequently abides with people who in early life have been uneducated, she was very chary of using her pen. When she did write, it was no formed hand, but an uncertain, half-intelligible scrawl; therefore, even if John Forsyth had ever seen it, his not recognising it was no unlikely circumstance. But Ninian's quick perceptions were ready to catch at anything that could afford a clue to a subject that frequently rested painfully on his kindly heart.

He did not mention his suspicions, but made some excuse to go to his study, and compare this melancholy line with one or two notes which were the sole relics that remained of his acquaintance with Rachel.

The resemblance was striking, but not conclusive; and even if it had been, what further trace was there of this unfortunate, who was indeed, in the sight of man, a "wronged sinner?" But oh! how much heavier than the sin had been the wrong!

Ninian sat a long time in sorrowful meditation, at the end of which he had arranged something like a consecutive plan for seeking out and aiding Rachel. In so thinking he received the balm which all good hearts ever find—oblivion for many restless fears and vain desires which had haunted him that day. Nevertheless, as in putting by the blotted scrawl which John Forsyth had left in his hands, it touched the packet of Hope's small, neat letters, his last thought was a mingled thanksgiving and a prayer for his own tender darling, that under all chances, whether or not her future was given to his keeping, it might be ever peaceful and bright! And under this feeling, that the division between these two and their fate, might be clearly indicated even in the veriest trifles, he actually put Rachel's letters in a

separate drawer, lest the taint of their misery and wrong should even in fancy approach the precious paper over which the child's soft hands had passed. It was a conceit almost puerile ; but it showed how deeply, amidst all the strength of his outer character, lay this inexpressible, all-softening tenderness, which had nestled itself in the core of Ninian's heart.

When he rejoined his family, he found with surprise that the erratic Mr. Ulverston was gone.

"He certainly is the most eccentric and unaccountable of mankind!" cried Tinie, slightly annoyed at the defection of her cavalier. "He suddenly discovered that he had promised to sleep at a friend's house; and thither he accordingly went, in a perfect fever of punctuality,—so great, that he would not allow us to disturb you. But he promised without fail to reappear in the morning."

However, Mr. Ulverston's promise, "without fail," was about as much to be relied on as those of most Irishmen ; who, Heaven

bless them ! are always ready for any deed of kindness or courtesy—at *the time*—but have the shortest memories and most convenient consciences in the world.

The Græmes never heard of their vanished guest again, until they learned from Hope Ansted's next letter that he was flourishing in London. However, Tinie's little vanity soon recovered its wound, and she consoled herself for Mr. Ulverston's neglect by changing his cognomen of "Desdichado" into the still more appropriate one of "The Flash of Lightning."

CHAPTER VII.

THE summer waned—the winter came—and still in the now narrowed circle at The Gowans all things went on in their accustomed round; Tinie, appearing amid Edinburgh gaieties under the auspices of her married sisters, became a planet that showed its light rarely enough in the home-atmosphere. Reuben, too, growing up into man's estate, had quenched his inquiring mind in the humbler pursuits of a physician's pupil, and was only visible to his family on divers Sundays and holidays. And Charlie, who was always a wild sort of laddie and no scholar, began to be perpetually missing among the ships of Leith harbour, and to hint darkly

that there was no life like a sailor's. Thus gradually Lindsay and Ninian saw their young nestlings trying their wings, ready to fly out into the wide world.

Many an evening as they sat—the brother and sister—by their winter fireside, where of all the merry voices the sole voice remaining was that very gruff one of Charlie's—Ninian began to have dreams of the empty places being filled with a dearer household still. Therefore he did not look half so dreary as Lindsay did, when month after month marked the decadence of that little republic of which she had been the guardian.

Somehow, as time passed, an irresistible longing drew Ninian towards London, to see once more the child who was so dear to him. It was only to see her, to watch her from the depths of his dumb love—for still that feeling which men have, and which they call "honourable pride," warned him that he must keep silence for a while longer. He comforted himself with her letters, so frank, so full of an affection which was not love, yet which in a nature like hers might easily become

such. It saved him from fear, it gave him hope; he was content, if not happy.

Once, during these months, he had been on the point of flying to the child. Trouble had fallen upon her. The two boys, who for years had tormented poor Ninian to such an extent, were now removed where they could torment no more. Soon after that grand era, the first marriage in the Græme family, both the young Ansteds had died of fever at school.

“ I have no brothers now but you,” wrote Hope sorrowfully; for though the tie had been to her hitherto little more than a name, still Ninian knew she had sometimes indulged dreams of seeing the two tiresome wilful boys grow up into good men. However Heaven forbade, and poor Hope was left brotherless.

Ninian longed to go and comfort her, but something in her letter, and in Mr. Ansted's, forbade. The latter needed no consolation; he had never much cared about the boys, and all his epistle to Mr. Græme, except a sentence of decent sorrow, was filled up with

an account of their elegant funeral. So the poor little fellows were disposed of, and Hope Ansted became her father's sole heiress.

Except this, there was apparently no change in her life. Her letters reached The Gowans regularly as ever, sometimes cheerful, sometime grave. At last, in the early spring-time, there came a silence longer than usual; and then Ninian's heart began to yearn over his darling—so wildly—that he made an excuse of business, or rather, for he was above all subterfuges, engaged in a business which he knew would call him to London. He was not tied hand and foot to his office now, for Ninian Græme was growing a prosperous man, and need not toil as he did in the days of his adversity.

So one day, having startled Lindsay by the news of his journey, and comforted her by the thought that by him she would have new tidings of her boy Edmund, Mr. Græme went off to London.

He had not been there for many years—not since he was a very young man. He

never liked its bustle and confusion, and much preferred his beloved Edinburgh, lying year by year in aristocratic, dreamy sleep. As he drove through the streets, anxious to fulfil before nightfall the business on which he had come, so that, duty being done, no thought might distract the morrow's joy,—he yet could not keep himself from fancying that every light, small figure was that which had used to trip beside him many a morning, winter and summer, as he walked into Edinburgh. One little day more,—and he should see it again! His heart, that was so manly, yet so simple—so strong, yet so pure—swelled within him, like that of a youth waiting for the footsteps of his first love.

I know that this is a rare case—that there is hardly any man who, living unmarried for thirty years, has not drained dry, or else changed into poison, the cup of love that was given him to be the sustenance of his existence. I know that Ninian may be smiled at, as being that strange anomaly—a man with a womanly heart—a heart which, despite all its world-scars, was at the depth tender and pure

as any maiden's. 'There are such, thank God ! but they are few indeed.

Ninian reached London at noon, and by night had diligently accomplished all his business. He first thought that he would go and see Kenneth Reay, but he persuaded himself that the hour was too late, and that he had better wait until the morrow. Now that his work was done, restlessness took possession of him. He set off on a ramble through the frosty, moonlit streets, whither he hardly knew, until he found himself inquiring of a beneficent policeman the way to the Regent's Park.

It was close at hand ; the quiet esplanade glittering in the moonlight—a pretty place is the Regent's Park, at night. Nor is the Cockney Coliseum itself so very despicable ; or the long terrace-range, where, on still summer nights, one can hear one's feet echo, and scent hawthorn and lilac-trees at every step. Even Ninian thought it not so bad, and, with an almost childish fancy, paused to wonder whose little feet might possibly have touched the pavement where his now followed,

perhaps at only a few hours' interval. It is strange what follies people in his state of mind lean to; how, lingering near those whom we have long hallowed in our hearts, we fancy the very trees and stones, feeling the same influence as ourselves, must "prate of their whereabouts."

Ninian thought he would walk on and see the house where the Ansteds lived; it would prevent his losing time over that search in the morning. He asked for Chester-terrace, feeling it strange to speak the address he had written so often. As he neared the house, this strong, clear-headed, clear-hearted man felt himself growing weak as an infant. He trembled to think how, in a year's absence, he had idealised his little pet into a beloved mistress, and was sinking from his calm elder-brotherhood into the veriest lover that ever trembled before the idol of his heart.

He came to the house, and hesitatingly glanced up, as if he expected to see her shadow on the blind. There was no shadow, for there was no light within. In the closed

window was a staring printed board—"This House to Let."

Ninian started back in blank dismay. His first thought was that he must have been deceived in the number or in the terrace. But no! his clear memory soon set those doubts aside. It must have been the house they had lived in—they were gone, and it was empty.

He read the board over and over again, mechanically, until he at last noticed the "Inquire within." He knocked with an uncertain hand—remembering whose fingers must have often rested on the same place. There was an apparition of one of those starved-looking women whom one continually sees as care-takers of empty houses—poor slip-shod creatures, generally with two or three children, which are thankfully hidden under any roof. She came, holding the door ajar, and peering out by the light of her farthing candle, until she saw that the summoner was not a thief, but a gentleman.

"This house is to be let?"

"Yes, sir. For cards to view, apply at——" and she began quoting the notice outside.

"I don't want to take the house. I wish to inquire about its former tenants. They must have left suddenly. Where are they gone?"

"You're not the first as has wanted to know that," said the woman, with a grin. "I've answered a score of them—butchers, bakers, and all;—that it's no use coming bothering me—I knows nothing!"

With that she slammed the door in Ninian's face, leaving him struck with a pain so intense, that he stood for some minutes on the steps before he could collect his thoughts—visions of Hope starving, homeless, or enduring the horrors of a bankrupt household—Hope—his delicate-minded, gentle love. He would go and snatch her out of her father's very sight, rather than she should be tortured or tainted thus.

Something he must learn, and at once. He had persuaded himself that it was too late to go to Dr. Reay's; but now he be-thought himself that the Professor was in the

habit of studying till midnight, and they two would talk better alone. He set off briskly, and St. Pancras clock was booming out eleven as he knocked at his old friend's door.

It was a year since he had seen Kenneth Reay, during which time the Professor had, through some valuable astronomical discoveries, risen high in worldly honour. Ninian expected to find him changed; but no! the tall gowned figure that opened the hall-door wore the same awkward, half-slovenly aspect, only a little older and more care-worn.

"Is that you, Edmund? You are early home to-night. I wish you would always keep the same hours!" sighed the worthy man, in a tone of kindest reproof, as he looked out into the dark.

"It is not Edmund—it is I. Don't you know me, Kenneth?"

Reay let the candle fall, so extreme was his amazement and agitation. "I didn't know you—my eyes are often half-blind when I take them from my work. You'll forgive me, Græme? I am so glad to see you," cried

the Professor, in a hurried, broken voice, as he dragged his friend to a room at the further end of the hall, where, amidst books and astronomical instruments, and heaped-up papers of calculations, the man of science was wearing his hours of sleep away.

He pushed Ninian into a chair, stirred the fire, tossed half a dozen folios down in his extreme restlessness, and at last said with some agitation,

“It’s surely nothing gone wrong that brings you here? They are all well at The Gowans?”

“All—which means only Lindsay and Charlie. Tinie is at Portobello with Esther and Ruth. We are every one of us flourishing. And how is it with you and yours? You are a great man now, eh! Kenneth?”

Kenneth shook his head and smiled rather sadly. “Nothing to what I desire to be, if I had time. But the college occupies me in the day, and then at night I have tried my eyes so much, that now they will not stand much work. It is very hard! I was obliged to give up but just now in the very middle of

this." And half-sighing, he pointed to an enormous calculation of most diminutive figures—a perfect arithmetical building. I thought I would have finished it before the lad Edmund came home."

"Is he often out—and do you always sit up for him?"

"There is nobody else to do it, or my aunt would know of his being late, and then he would have no peace, poor young fellow."

"I fear he has been much trouble to you," answered Ninian, his brotherly alarms putting out of his mind for the time being the one sole question which had driven him hither. "I hope he is not going wrong?"

"Oh, no! He is only gay and cheerful, like the rest of your family. He reminds me of them very often in his looks and ways. Even if he did rather discompose me, I could not find in my heart to say a hard word to Edmund."

Ninian looked affectionately at the Professor, who was leaning against the mantelpiece, his fingers unconsciously pressing down the lids upon his hot aching eyes.

“God bless you, Kenneth ; you are a worthy soul,” murmured he. And then no longer able to control his anxiety, he asked Reay the plain, abrupt question, “Had he seen anything of the Ansteds?”

“Not much. I don’t care for society.”

“But lately, I mean. Do you know where they are living?”

“I forget exactly ; but my aunt or Edmund can tell you to-morrow. Somewhere in the Regent’s Park, I think. It is a fine house, with such a grand horizon for astronomical observation. I wish my house had anything like it.”

“What, don’t you know that they have left? I have reason to suppose they are in great difficulties. I ought to find them out at once. Can’t you use your worldly wisdom and help me, my good fellow?” Ninian cried, with a degree of impatience which the next moment he regretted having betrayed, and added, “I am very anxious about Miss Ansted, for Lindsay’s sake, and Tinie’s — they were both so fond of her.”

“Yes ; I remember. She has come up

and talked to me of the days by Gare-Lochside many a time. A gentle, kind little thing! She is not in trouble, is she?"

"I cannot tell, and I must find out. Would Edmund know? Where is Edmund gone to-night?"

"I don't know — I scarcely ever ask. Stay," continued Reay, trying to brace up all his mundane faculties of ordinary sense, "I think he is at Mr. Ulverston's; and Mr. Ulverston might be able to give you some information, for whenever I go to the Ansteds, I always meet him there. A kind sort of young man! though light-minded and uncertain. I wonder if he ever will return my nineteen volumes of 'Philosophical Transactions?'"

Ninian wasted no more words, but giving a cordial promise that he would return next day, obtained from his old friend Mr. Ulverston's address, and so departed. With unwearied patience, though he had travelled all night, and walked all day, did he hasten through the moon-lit deserts of London squares, as they appeared a short time before

midnight. At last he found himself at Mr. Ulverston's door. It was a handsome bachelor's lodging in Pall-Mall, and through the slightly-opened windows of the drawing-room came sounds which indicated a gay bachelor's party going on within.

Ninian's Scottish reserve made him pause, with a certain dislike of intruding among them at that hour; but to relieve the wretched suspense of his mind he would have conquered any impediments. He presented himself before the merry group.

It was a group such as London literary society can always furnish to dazzle youth withal. Brilliancy, without positive vice; wit, at times polished to ultra-refinement, and again just coarse enough to attract lower natures, or the lowest half of all natures; good-fellowship warmed though scarce besotted, by the influence of wine and that dearly-beloved weed without which your modern geniuses seem to think it impossible to exist. Yet, *par parenthèse*, how would Shakspeare or Dante have looked with a cigar in his mouth?

In the midst of this sparkling convivial meeting stood the Scotsman, his face grave with restraint and anxiety, an apparition as unpleasant as those which the Greeks used to introduce at their feasts as a *memento mori*.

“Mr. Græme, upon my soul ! What fortunate north wind blew you hither ? Or did you rise up like a ghost to avenge the *manes* of all your countrymen whom my friend here has been abusing so infernally for the last half-hour ? Mr. —, Mr. Ninian Græme.”

And then Ninian bowed in response to this introduction to one whom he knew by repute as the keenest satirist and greatest intellectual profligate of the day.

“Edmund—my dear fellow—rouse up ! Here is your brother—a messenger of no ill news, I trust.”

“Have no fear, my boy !” said Ninian, hastily, as the young man—he looked, indeed, quite a young man now—rose from the arm-chair where he had been lolling, and walked—rather unsteadily, though with the unsteadiness of one bewildered with excitement

more than wine—to meet his elder brother. He did not say, or look, “I am glad to see you.” There was a slight confusion in his manner, as if he were half-ashamed to have a plain-looking, travel-disordered man introduced as his relative to such a brilliant society.

On his part, Ninian saw with pain how constrained was the greeting—how haggard the boyish face was growing, while the whole mien had acquired a mannish forwardness unbecoming in one so young. Edmund did not look like the same boy who had used to lean with his head on his elder brother’s shoulder in the pleasant Sunday evenings at The Gowans.

But whatever Ninian thought, he made no remark; and just then there was throbbing in his heart a fear closer even than that for his brother.

He sat down amidst this goodly company of men, chiefly consisting of the wits of Young England, whose daring, frothy pen would cause the heavy humorists of King George’s time to shudder in their graves.

To and fro, darting zig-zag across the table, like flashes of harmless lightning, came a perpetual succession of jokes and repartees—some good, some bad. If any unfortunate wight started a serious topic, it was quenched amid this cross-fire of small artillery. Every subject, however high and holy, served as a target for practising on. There was nothing said that was positively evil, irreverent, or foul, but still it was an unhealthy atmosphere. Though Ninian, with his keen sense of humour and his cheerful temperament, would at any other time have had a degree of pleasure in sitting by and listening to this brilliant set, yet he felt that to speak, almost to think of Hope Ansted among them, was profanation.

He let half an hour slip by before he could bring himself to ask the question, for which alone he had visited Mr. Ulverston. When at last he put it, it was in a lower tone, and to Edmund.

“I have not seen the Ansteds for an age,” answered the boy, yawning. “I don’t care to go there. Hope is pretty, certainly, but

that's all; and the old father is such a confounded bore. Ask Ulverston, he is often with them, though I wonder how he stands it."

Ninian was not of a very pugnacious disposition, yet there came into his mind the rather cowardly thought that he should have liked to knock his younger brother down.

At last, half-scorning himself for the ridiculous sensitiveness that was overcoming his manhood, he put the question point-blank to his host.

"Have you any idea whither the Ansteds have removed?"

Mr. Ulverston abruptly set down the wine he was just raising to his lips. In doing so, he even spilled a little, as if he had been startled. He gave a quick glance out of the corners of his brilliant eyes, then pulled his moustache with a lordly air:

"My dear Græme, is it possible you don't know? I thought you were a greater friend of the family than even myself. Nay—don't be impatient. I'll tell you all about them presently. Meanwhile—this claret is not so bad. A glass with me?"

“They must have left Chester-terrace rather suddenly?” pursued Ninian, with the heedlessness of desperation.

“I rather think that was my doing, though the old father seemed not unwilling. But Hope was growing ill and pale; so I used my influence—as, indeed, she begged me—and they took a house some twelve miles out in the country.”

“Where?” said Ninian, closing his teeth upon the one syllable, and trying to keep his colour from flashing and his hands from clenching. He had not thought there was so much of a young man’s jealous blood left in him.

“Where! That is a secret safe in my keeping,” laughed Mr. Ulverston, in an under tone. “To tell the truth, they wished to live perfectly retired, partly because of Hope’s health, partly because——”

“Mr. Ansted may be in difficulties,” bluntly said Ninian.

“In difficulties? Ridiculous! I know it to be impossible, for he has confided to me all his affairs. A gentleman—or rather, a

person with a gentleman's income," added he, with the most polite of sneers, "may find himself at times short of cash, especially when he has a turn for speculation. But Mr. Ansted's connexions are enormous—and attractive, too. To my certain knowledge, our pretty Hope could be a Baroness if she chose."

"She has not chosen then?"

"I suspect not. Possibly she has her own reasons for objecting." And there was upon the young man's face a smile that cut Ninian to the heart.

"However, you must not mention this," continued Mr. Ulverston, confidentially. "Her father himself is not aware of the fact; but I know the respect in which Miss Ansted holds you. Well, when do you think of seeing them?"

"You forget that my first question is unanswered. Twelve miles from London is rather a wide direction. Still, we lawyers are acute in finding out mysteries; I may perhaps dive to the bottom of yours."

The quick flashing anger which sometimes, on the slightest apparent grounds, darkened Mr. Ulverston's good humour, appeared now. "Dare you——" said he, and then in a changed and pleasantly-mocking tone, he laughed off his words. "Dare you, really? Suppose you should come up empty-handed, and get drowned before you reached the surface? No, my dear Mr. Græme, don't trouble yourself; there is no mystery at all. I don't deal in such. I'm a fellow transparent as glass. There!"

And smiling with an air of frank good temper, he wrote the address on one of his own cards, and handed it to Ninian.

It was a feeling, perhaps not courtly, but yet irresistible, which made Mr. Græme, having glanced at the card on which was printed "Mr. Ulverston," and beneath written in delicate flourishes, as if the writer amused himself by playing with the name, "Hope Ansted, Marylands, Arlington," to copy the address in his own pocket-book, and then return the card.

“ — Nay, I don't want it. I know the place well enough by this time,” said Mr. Ulverston gayly.

Ninian took up the card and put it in the fire. He felt a savage pleasure in seeing it crackle and blaze. Soon after, he rose up to say farewell.

“ What, have we frightened you away already? Edmund, surely you are not vanishing too?”

“ He can do as he pleases,” said Ninian, for once neglectful even of the company of his favourite brother. But Edmund, seeing the pale, disturbed, weary look that Ninian wore, felt a slight conscience-sting, and followed him away.

“ Shall I drive you down to Arlington to-morrow?—that is, the day after; for I was there yesterday, and must not wear out my welcome. Will you come?”

“ I thank you, no,” said Ninian. He would rather have never met Hope at all than gone to meet her accompanied by Mr. Ulverston.

All the way home, Edmund talked, as he had now learned to talk, in the reckless,

witty fashion of the set among which he moved, until, passing under a street lamp, he looked at his silent brother.

“By—Jove!” he cried, repressing a less harmless expletive, which was not yet quite familiarised to his boyish lips. “You are not ill, brother Ninian? What makes you look so harassed, and so old?”

“I have not been in bed these two nights, and have travelled or worked all day. And as for looking old—why, I must expect it, you know. Never mind me, my boy.”

Edmund pressed his arm with a feeling of compunction and tenderness. He ceased his light chatter, and walked on, very quiet. Perhaps he was thinking how while he lived so gayly, his elder brother toiled. Perhaps too the affectionate smile and the gentle “my boy,” made him consider over his own worthiness of the same. But certain it is, that as they reached the Professor’s door, Edmund parted from his brother with a good-by so loving and so humble, that Ninian, sore as his heart was, drew comfort from the thought that his young brother at least was growing up to be his pride, and, perhaps, his stay.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a soft February morning, with a warm mist going up from the grass, and breaking at last into sunshine so bright that the air felt just like summer. The season had been remarkably early that year ; and, though the second calendar month was yet within a day or two of its closing, the birds and the budding leaves seemed bent on putting all almanacs to shame, and making everybody believe that it was really spring. The farmers shook their heads and talked about blights and frosts that must surely follow this unnatural weather, but children basked in the sunshine, and young people felt their pulses beat in response to the glad pulses of the spring.

Ninian's was one of those. It is strange, for how many years, and through what struggles, pains, and cares, the faint inward spirit of hope and cheerfulness will remain alive. Often, a blithe bright morning—a mere gleam of sunshine—will make one feel, if not happy, at least eager to receive happiness. It is the constant aspiring of the flame, which ever tends upward so long as there is any flame at all.

It must have been a sore-wounded, crushed spirit, indeed, that would not have risen lighter on such a sweet spring-day. Ninian, walking along the country road where the railway-train had deposited him, lifting his head to drink the fresh air, smiling at the little children, who, as English village-children always do, dropped curtseys to “the gentleman,”—Ninian, I say, would hardly have been recognised for the same man who had tossed all night on his weary bed, and risen haggard and sleepless, uncertain whether he should not at once rush back to Edinburgh, and dull his brain and heart into forgetfulness amidst the toils of his profession.

He did not think so however, when the soft fresh air stole into his spirit ; something like the influence of one who had come to him like a pleasant spring-day—a garland of young leaves—a bunch of violets—he had called her by all these pretty pet-names in times gone by. Mr. Græme was not very sentimental by nature, but an unwonted weakness stole over him as he thought of these things. For the time being he would gladly have put off his worldly self with all its honours, duties, and cares, to sit in Corydon-and-Phillis-fashion-with the child beside him, listening to the larks that now sang so merrily over his head, forgetting everything except the love he bore his darling—which made him almost a boy again, for love so unselfish and pure is ever young.

It was a lonely country road, dotted with mansions here and there, and he was puzzled in finding out Marylands. At last he gained the information that it was the next house which boasted of a lodge and a laurel hedge. The green laurel leaves soon glittered in his sight. In another minute he would look

upon his beloved, his heart's desire ! He paused a little, thinking how he should announce himself, and whether he should ask for Mr. Ansted first, lest his sudden coming—the coming of an old friend—might startle Hope ; for he remembered Mr. Ulverston said she had not been strong. Would she look pale and thin, like the sick child he had used to carry in his arms, or would she——

His contemplations were broken by the sound of a carriage. It came through the lodge-gates, and dashed past him quickly, but not too quickly for him to discern, bent forward in smiling conversation with some piece of humanity—man or woman, he knew not which—the face which, from that of a mere girl, he had been for these twelve months conjuring into a dream-angel.

It was beaming, smiling—there were about it pink ribbons and laces—it had the air of a woman, and a woman of fashion, and yet it bore the likeness which he could not mistake—it was certainly Hope Ansted ! And in a moment it was gone.

He had once more beheld his darling !

He stood by the roadside, looking after the carriage with flushing cheek and quick-coming breath. Then, as if a heavy cloud had come over him, he sank his head on his breast, and leaned against the laurel hedge.

Was he disappointed, because she had passed him by unnoticed? It was a mere chance, she being smiling and talking the while. What harm was there in the gay attire? What marvel in the girl's having grown into a woman? And if Hope did ride in a carriage, what possible objection could he urge against her for that?

Mocking himself, somewhat bitterly, for his own consummate folly, Ninian changed his first determination, which was to take the next train to London, and quietly entered the lodge-gates.

Mr. Ansted was at home, walking over his little pleasure-ground with a hundred-acre sort of air, ordering his gardeners about and giving impossible orders in a lordly voice. The sight of Mr. Græme approaching down the avenue, however, seemed to

operate unpleasantly on his feelings. He drew back, and then advanced cautiously, as if the still uncanceled debt rose like a grim monster between him and his coming guest. But there was nothing of the "Pay me what thou owest" aspect in Ninian. He had, indeed, forgotten that the man was his debtor at all. He tried to assume the most cordial aspect he could, to which Mr. Ansted responded with his usual patronising welcome.

"So, my excellent friend, you have found me out in my little country pleasures. Delighted to see you. Have you been long come southwards? And"—with a sudden, distrustful air—"how did you discover my snug hermitage?"

"Mr. Ulverston told me. I thought I might take advantage of the information and visit you."

"Of course—most happy! But the fact is, I have fairly had to run away and hide myself from my friends. Our circle became so enormous—such a life of dissipation, really quite a bore. So we came here for a

little rest—to live quietly and retired, myself and my daughter.”

“Miss Ansted is well, I trust?”

“Quite well—she has just taken the carriage to drive out our neighbour, Lady Ulverston, to whom Hope is very kind always.”

The little, gentle girl showering benevolences on a Lady Ulverston! Times were changing, certainly! Ninian dreaded that when she came in, it would be *Miss Ansted* he would meet, and not his darling child.

He followed Mr. Ansted into the house, which was a perfect *bijou* of a place, full of everything that taste and luxury could design. The master walked through his pleasant abode, pointing out its beauties with great pride.

“Are they all of your collecting—these pictures and articles of *vertu*?” asked Ninian, who had not given Hope’s father credit for so much love of art and refinement.

“Mine! Not exactly. I hired this house from some poor devil of an author, who was glad to let it cheap. Money, my dear sir—

money can do everything. I think of purchasing it just as it stands. It will take a good sum; but what of that? One must have things nice about one."

Just at this moment Ninian remembered what he had heard the night before, standing on the door-steps of the empty house. He looked round on this abode, and his honest heart recoiled. He pictured Hope smiling in the carriage—could she know or guess all that he guessed? She might not—she might be walking ignorantly in the very midst of this deceitful show, believing her father a rich man—an honourable man—as his former creditor once hoped he had become.

Ninian thought he would stay and judge. So, for two mortal hours he endured Mr. Ansted's conversation, and listened to his boasts, until that personage was summoned away to consult with the worthy upper-labourer he pompously entitled "my steward."

Mr. Græme walked into the little conservatory, which he knew would contain many

tokens of Hope's presence, she was so fond of flowers. Her favourites were there—white camellias, purple hyacinths, and, as if to show that she kept her childish loves still, there was lying on one of the fantastic rural seats an open book on gardening, with a bunch of sweet violets left upon its leaves. It made him think of her—not as Mr. Ansted's daughter—but as the little Hope, all of whose feelings were as fresh, and true, and pure, as if she had been born an honest man's child.

He sat down, laid the book on his knee, and played with the March-violets ; until he heard some one open the further door of the conservatory. There was a footstep, slow and tired—a pause—a heavy sigh ; and he saw through the leaves the same pink bonnet and lace veil. But there was not the same face under it ; there was a face looking weary and sad,—that heaviest sadness which follows forced smiles ! Hope had returned, and, all unwitting who was there, had come to sit among her flowers, to find there a little solitude—a little peace.

She passed slowly down the walk, some-

times stopping to look at her favourite plants, with a distrait, troubled air, passed quite along to the end, when, half-hid behind the orange-trees, she saw Ninian Græme.

Hope started, and, as was usual to her in all moments of agitation or surprise, her colour rose in a crimson flood. Then with a cry of delight she flew to her adopted brother ; and was just going to throw herself on his neck—as a sister should—when some inexplicable reserve made her pause. But she took and clasped his hands ; hanging upon them with undisguised affection and joy.

“Are you glad to see me, Hope?” murmured the voice, hoarse and low, in which Ninian strove to hide his weakness and resume his manhood.

“Oh, so glad, so glad ! How I longed to ask you to come—you and Tinie ! Over and over again I have planned it, but——”

“I know—I understand—of course it was impossible,” said he, rightly interpreting her faltering looks. “But I thought, happening to be in London, I might come. And

your father has kindly asked me to stay over Sunday."

"He has seen you, then?" said Hope, with a look of great relief; "and you will stay! How happy that will be!" And once more she pressed his hands with unfeigned joy.

His spirit was moved within him. "You are not changed to me, Hope? You are the same little girl you always were?" said he, with a quivering lip.

"Always; why should you doubt it?"

"And you are happy? Let me look in your face and see if you are really happy?" Ninian continued, drawing her towards him.

But something made her start from her soft, bending attitude, and become rigid in womanly dignity. It was nothing of his causing—it was the sound of a heavy step and loud voice at the door. Hearing it, her few soft tears dried up; her face resumed its calm. She was turning into the Miss Ansted whom Ninian had pictured.

"So, Miss A., how soon you have come

home; and what did Lady Ulverston think of the new brougham?"

"I never asked, papa."

"It is the most elegant carriage in the county," continued Mr. Ansted; "I assure you, Mr. Græme, it will cost me ninety guineas—not a shilling less."

Hope turned away restlessly.

"And I have ordered from the same maker the prettiest little pony-carriage——"

"I do not want it, papa; I told you so," said Hope, quickly. "I had rather much not drive, indeed."

"Pooh, nonsense. We decided all that yesterday," returned the father; and then there ensued an uncomfortable silence. To break it, Ninian asked who was Lady Ulverston? Any relative to the Mr. Ulverston whom they all knew.

"His cousin's wife," Hope answered, playing with her bunch of violets. "Sir Peter is an old man, and very poor, as he succeeded to the bare title, and Mr. Ulverston to the estate; but his cousin—our Mr. Ulverston—is very, very kind to him."

“And so is my daughter to Lady Ulverston. I often wonder what Hope can see in such a cantankerous old woman, no better than an old maid. But perhaps it is as well, considering all things.” And he patted Hope on the shoulder with a smile that made her change to scarlet, and then grow white. She slowly gathered up her bonnet and veil, which she had unfastened, and, with a few words to her father, and a smile to Ninian, quitted the conservatory.

If Mr. Ansted had a merit, it was hospitality—fulsome, perhaps, and partaking of that self-exaltation which was the very core of his nature, but still hospitality. Under his benignant compulsion Ninian made arrangements for a three days’ stay.

“You will be very quiet—we have no visitors to-day, except, indeed, one or two of my new neighbours, whom I asked to come and taste my last bin of still Champagne. Capital wine, too! I can’t drink anything but still Champagne.”

Involuntarily Ninian thought of the empty house at Chester-terrace, and the

wronged butchers and bakers hammering at the door.

He did not see Hope again until at dinner-time she made her appearance in the drawing-room, where were lounging three or four gentlemen who looked like steady dinner-eaters and wine-drinkers. Hope saluted them gravely, as became the mistress of a household receiving her father's guests, and then sat down, a little apart.

Narrowly, with eager gaze, Ninian observed her. She was dressed gracefully and well, but with extreme plainness. Her whole aspect, her demeanour, and among that group of men, where she was the only lady, marked one whom necessity had taught dignity, self-possession, and self-control. She was every inch a woman now. Even her father treated her as such, called her "Miss Ansted" and "my daughter," and looked at her as if she were the reflection of his own importance. His manner to her was all suavity, except once, when he came up to her as if to speak on some domestic arrangement. Then Ninian, whose old habits made him hear distinctly,

whether with or against his will, all that was ever said by or to Hope, distinguished this brief colloquy :

“Why have you no ornaments to-day? You will not wear those I gave you.”

“I cannot, papa. I have told you so before.”

“You are a little fool! You forget your position as my daughter.”

No answer, save a bitter spasm passing across the sweet young face.

“I say you shall wear them. What have you done with them? You have not dared to——”

“No, not that—how could I? You need not be afraid, papa.”

He gave her a glance, in which was something of anger, more of fear,—and went away. Hope sighed, and leaned over the book of prints she was looking at, never moving or lifting her head, until Ninian came to take her down to dinner.

The guests preceded her; she, as mistress of the house, came last—Mr. Ansted was always very precise in trivial points of etiquette.

“It is a long time since this little hand has lain here,” said Ninian, in his tender, brotherly way. Hope pressed his arm, and for a moment her heart seemed ready to burst; but she never uttered a word. Very soon he saw her sitting at the head of the table, with a calm, serious grace; and he began to guess that the “long time” had concealed things of which she had never spoken in her letters. Nothing but the hard teaching of many an inward care could have so transformed into reserved womanhood the simple, artless child.

The dinner was long, and the conversation such as usually takes place at a table where the host is a *bon vivant*. Hope bore little part therein. When, a good deal of wine being imbibed in a comparatively short time, the talking became loud and careless—too much so for a girl’s ears—Miss Ansted quietly rose and departed, and Ninian was glad to see her retire. But tenderly his fancy followed her; and many a time, during the intervals of after-dinner conversation—which was of the style which might naturally

be expected when the whole party were just a degree short of being gentlemen—he conjured up the little figure sitting alone in the drawing-room ; perhaps gazing into the fire with that sad, weary look which he had seen in the morning.

As soon as he could, he left the dining-room. He longed to have a few minutes of quiet talk with Hope. He had a thousand questions to ask ; above all he wanted to satisfy a foolish thought which had sprung to his mind the night before, but which the sight of Hope to-day had for the time put to flight. It was about Mr. Ulverston, and his boasted intimacy at the house.

“Is that true ?” Ninian had contrived to ask during dinner. “Does he often come here ?”

“Yes, papa likes him,” was Hope’s brief answer ; and no more was said. She talked very little to any one, indeed ; nor could Mr. Græme read her countenance as he used to do. The unwonted reserve of her demeanour, evidently adopted from necessity, cast a veil over that once transparent character, which seemed to hide her feelings even from him who

loved her and knew her best. But he thought when alone with him, she would surely open her heart, and reveal some of the cares which, he feared, troubled her young life now.

Hope was not alone, though she might have been, so quiet was the drawing-room when Ninian put his hand on the door. Sitting beside her on the sofa was a precise, timid-looking, old maidish person, in a slate-coloured dress ; opposite, leaning by the fire, his eyes cast down with great softness and tenderness, was a young man, once characterised by Hope as "the handsomest she had ever seen." Probably she would not have denied the statement now. Nor, indeed, could anybody. When he looked serious, there were few finer countenances than Mr. Ulverston's.

At the sound of the door, Hope lifted her head quickly ; but seeing who it was, she rose up to meet Ninian with a beaming smile.

"Another surprise for you, Mr. Græme," said she, slightly blushing. "I know you

will be delighted to see your old friend here."

"I saw him last night," said Ninian, extending his hand, but still looking with an eager anxiety toward Hope. He felt somewhat disappointed that she was not alone.

"Where did you two meet? You never told me anything," said Hope, half turning to Mr. Ulverston.

"I forgot for the moment—and you know we have been talking of so many other things," said he, with his low winning voice.

Miss Ansted made room beside her for her old friend—her "adopted brother," as she called him,—with a loving, grateful look,—in introducing him to Lady Ulverston.

Ninian wondered why she should thus reveal to a mere stranger the former compact between them. He rather wished she had not done so. But he was soothed by her kind manner; every look of those sweet eyes fell upon him with healing and comfort. He did not even mind the attendant shadow that seemed to haunt Miss Ansted wherever she

moved. It was Mr. Ulverston's way with every pretty woman.

And Hope had become not merely pretty; she was beautiful—more beautiful than even Ninian had first thought, when he saw her under the shade which her father's presence seemed continually to throw over her. She appeared to forget it now—she smiled, talked, and sung, with her lovely, pathetic voice; singing which, though not that of genius or passion—for Hope had not a particle of either one or the other—was yet sweet and heart-touching, because it came from the heart.

“Ah, my dear Miss Ansted!” cried the shy and awkward Lady Ulverston, who seemed to look up with eyes of adoration to everything around her, and especially to her elegant cousin-in-law, by whom she was treated with a sort of careless kindness. “My dear Miss Ansted sings like an angel! We all love her,” added she, with a devotion too simple to appear like flattery. “Nobody could help loving her, even if

she were only a poor girl, instead of an heiress."

Hope drew back and looked pained.—
"Don't let your cousin talk thus," Ninian heard her say to Mr. Ulverston, who leaned over the piano; "I am not an heiress—I never shall be; I have told you so many a time and you will not believe me." Her tone was very earnest, even to agitation; but it was answered in a light, bantering way.

"Who ever believes young ladies' declarations on that subject? As if they could know anything about the matter! But, as I likewise have told you many a time—whether an heiress or not, Miss Ansted would be the same to me and to every one."

It was a compliment naturally following the subject of conversation—one that a man of graceful speeches like Mr. Ulverston would be certain to make. Perhaps, though, he need not have made it so tenderly; and Hope need not have changed colour while he did so. But Ninian was placed where he could not see that. He only noticed the blush soon after. Declining to sing any more,

she came and sat between himself and Lady Ulverston, with a sweet content upon her downcast face; and her manner to both her friends, old and new, was softer and gentler than ever. But Mr. Ulverston held aloof; and was so silent that any one might have said he was buried in deep thought, if such a light mind as his could ever be supposed guilty of that enormity, particularly in society.

It was late before the rest of the party left the dining-room, and when they did, their appearance did not much conduce to the pleasure of the evening, they being individuals whose years and country-habits showed them to belong to that period of out-of-date sociality when, in polite parlance, "gentlemen liked to sit long after dinner." No one was positively "*drunk*"—an unpleasant word, which is usually supposed only suitable as applied to the lower classes—but almost everybody was what is considerately termed "*merry*." One, the quietest, dozed in his chair; another persisted in telling comic stories; while Mr. Ansted himself, his

shining face, once well-looking enough, glowing with the purple tint which marks the middle age of a free liver, talked with great gusto of every titled acquaintance he had, and overwhelmed poor frightened Lady Ulverston with his laboured civilities.

Hope sat at the piano, turning over the leaves of her music, her face growing gradually paler. No disgust or contempt was there, for her nature was too humble; nor in the passing look she cast towards her father was visible any pang of wounded affection. She came to him when he called, she addressed his guests with perfect courtesy, but all was with the manner of one who, knowing she has a duty to do, does it. She was *Miss Ansted* only, not Hope.

Once or twice, when she had to talk to these not over-fascinating guests, or to reply to her father's fault-finding—he was less bland after dinner than he was before—the girl cast a half-anxious, half-appealing glance to Mr. Ulverston, as if she were accustomed to look to him for aid in a position that must have been annoying to so young a hostess.

This time, however, he did attempt to assist her ; but seemed to scan with a certain degree of contempt the company into which he had fallen,—twirled his moustache with dignity,—and took very little notice of anybody.

Before long, he gave his elderly cousin-in-law a hint for their retreat, which the timid woman immediately obeyed.

“ We must be gone now, if you will excuse us, Mr. Ansted,” said she ; “ Sir Peter is a great invalid, as you know, and likes to have the house all quiet by eleven.”

“ Hollo, Ulverston, you’ll sleep here, won’t you ? It is much pleasanter than Sir Peter’s little cottage—no bigger than a dog-kennel.”

“ I own a bear’s den would be larger, if not so pleasant,” returned the young man, with his blandest smile. “ Still, excuse me this time, as I must return to town early to-morrow morning. So, adieu for the present !”

He bade Ninian a polite farewell, hoped to see him before he left, and then made his usual elegant disappearance. Certainly, compared with the other guests, he looked a

Hyperion among satyrs! Ninian acknowledged this; though, while so thinking, he sighed.

“What—are they gone to the dining-room again?” said Hope, as, after seeing the Ulverstons away, she returned and found Ninian sitting alone.

“Your papa wanted them to smoke, I believe.”

“Ah! there they will stay half the night,” returned the poor girl, bitterly. But quickly she added—“I am sorry, because it is not good for papa. I wish Mr. Ulverston had not gone.”

“Why?” asked Ninian, with a sudden pang.

“Because papa never—does this when he is here. He can persuade papa to anything, being such a favourite with him.”

“And with you, too?”

Hope paused, though it was a hesitation scarce perceptible. Then she said, “I like him because he is very kind to me, and—I need kindness often.”

There was a pathetic touch in this speech,

which without voluntarily betraying any home-secrets told Ninian all, and moved him to the heart's core.

"My child, you are not quite happy," said he, very tenderly. The tears glittered on her eye-lashes; she looked as if a word more would have unlocked their current; and then, with a sudden thought, she repressed it.

"Dear Mr. Græme—I can't answer you to-night. Perhaps I ought not to tell you anything at all."

There was something to be told, then! And a sudden undefined terror took possession of Ninian's faculties. He remained silent a long time, until the silence grew into a suspense that was almost maddening.

"You look very weary," said Hope, affectionately. "Had you not better go to rest? You know I must take care of my brother."

At the word, a thought struck him. He might under cover of that tie learn the truth of what tortured him so. Any truth, good or evil, would be better than this agonising suspense.

Ninian forced his lips into a smile, and said: "If so, may I not ask my little sister a question, which, if she does not answer, she must at least forgive."

She blushed with some inward consciousness, as maidens do; but replied, firmly, "Ask me anything, and I will answer—if it relates to myself only."

"It does! Tell me"—his words were abrupt and few—as few as those torn from the lips of a doomed man—"is my little sister engaged to Mr. Ulverston?"

"No."—The answer was low, and her head was bent.

"Has he ever asked you?"

"Never."

"But perhaps he will?"

"I think—I hope he never may!" said Hope, turning away so that Ninian did not see the trouble in her eyes.

He reproached himself for cruelty in thus wounding her womanly delicacy. Passionately he asked her forgiveness, and then drew back, afraid of betraying the intense joy that her words had imparted. He bade

her good-night, tenderly, as in the old times at The Gowans.—Save for one thing; he dared not trust himself to kiss the child's white forehead now.

Nor did she seem to expect it. Yet this reserve pained him not; but only filled him the more with a hope almost too delicious to bear. He felt a happy man that night,—ay, happy as if he had been a youth in the hey-day of his first love-dream, instead of a quiet, serious man, who had run a tilt with the hard world for nearly four-and-thirty years.

CHAPTER IX.

It was Sunday morning—sweet, and fresh, and spring-like. Hope sat at the head of the breakfast-table, as she used sometimes to sit at The Gowans, only with a grace less timid and more womanly. Her father did not appear.

“You will have to go to church alone with me,” said she. “Papa will not, I believe, go to-day. He hopes you will excuse his not rising to breakfast.”

Ninian could, very readily. Indeed, long after the morning hours, he had heard sounds of revelry which made the fact of his host’s being invisible easily accounted for. He received the excuse—his pity yearning over the daughter who “blushed

as she gave it in"—though with the blush of a sorrowing not an accusing angel. Neither made any further remark, but talked of the dear old times—of Lindsay, Tinie, and of the happy twin-brides. Hope sighed often, while speaking of those simple, innocent days.

They went to church; only they two—arm-in-arm together. It chanced to be the first time this had ever happened; since in the large household at The Gowans Mr. Græme and his ward were very seldom left alone. And to every pious heart, in whose depths lies an affection that in sacredness is held next to its religion, it is a solemn thing to enter God's house and there kneel and pray beside the one best beloved of all God's creatures—the one with whom we desire to walk hand-in-hand through His pleasant earth, and by whose side we hope to stand in His heaven, when there shall be no more need to say "*till death us part.*" Thus, to Ninian at least, it was a sweet and solemn church-going that day.

He had never been to an English church

before; but this was a village tabernacle, plain enough to harmonise with the most rigid Presbyterian feeling. It was very narrow and small, containing about a dozen high pews; the rest being mere benches. The communion-table was of homely wood, covered with a worm-eaten red cloth; the communion-seats were plain rush-bottomed chairs, and the altar railing was of honest, unpainted deal. Yet there the little parish congregation must have knelt for centuries; since in the stone flooring were inserted two monumental brasses, almost obliterated by time. The old Norman arch, with its hollowed recess for holy water, formed the doorway. The church might have been richer once, but now it was simply a church for the poor. There was not a gentleman's house in the parish except the clergyman's.

"I brought you here," whispered Hope, "because I thought you would like this pretty nook better than our grand new church at Arlington; and you would not dislike the long, quiet walk through fields and lanes."

He dislike it ? It had been one dream of pleasantness and peace ! There, with the slant pillar of sunbeams reaching up to every window—the old clergyman's voice sounding solemnly within, and larks hymning their matins from without—Ninian said his English prayers beside his beloved English girl.

There is a poem of Longfellow's, which probably Mr. Græme had never heard, for he was not well read in poetry, and was himself no poet, except in the silent language of his life. But if he had ever seen these verses, "A Gleam of Sunshine," doubtless his manly heart would have thrilled to their truth, for they might have been telling the story of this one Sunday—never to be forgotten :

"This is the highway to the town,
And here the green lane ends,
Through which I walked to church with thee,
O gentlest of my friends !

"Thy dress was like the lilies,
And thy heart as pure as they ;
One of God's holy angels
Did walk with me that day.

* * * * *

“Long was the good man’s sermon,
But it seemed not long to me.
For he spake of Ruth the beautiful,
And still I thought of thee.

“Long were the prayers he uttered,
But they seemed not so to me ;
For in my heart I prayed with him,
And still I prayed for thee.”

Ninian’s heart was full. He looked up at the clear sky, beneath which, when service was over, they two walked, she leaning on his arm. But she did not know that he was praying—that his heart, heavy with its deep love, had laid itself down at the feet of God, beseeching for *her*. She did not know, that all the way home, while she went smiling through the sunny fields her young soul seeming lightened of its care,—his was lifting up its passionate voice,—crying on Heaven to keep safe for him his life’s sole joy. Very solemn, too, was his prayer—not alone for the girl he loved, now tripping along in her sweet maidenhood, but for his wife, perhaps the mother of his children, his helpmeet in life’s coming work, wherein all things done should be done by them both, worthily and for the glory of God.—Until, that work

being over, they might lie side by side in some quiet place like this, with children's reverent tears dropping over them, waiting for the resurrection unto that Kingdom where all earthly marriage will be done away, and that marriage only remain, which, being an union spiritual and complete, is as indissoluble as the union of the soul with God.

Young men and maidens—idle dreamers of baseless dreams, which you call love, and toy with for a year, a month, a week—you know no more of the one true Love, the one sacred Marriage, than does a child who looking at his own image in two or three wayside ponds, fancies he has seen, and perhaps drained dry, the great ocean which rounds the world!

I have thus recorded Ninian Græme's thoughts, not his words. Of the latter, indeed, there was scarcely anything to tell. When people have been happy, they scarcely know what they have talked about,—if they have talked at all. Probably Hope was the chief speaker, but it was always of things of the past. She only seemed at

rest when she could ignore her present life altogether. She did so now—talked of old times, or else of the spring treasures she saw in their country walk—the young wheat, the budding woodbine leaves, the daisies, and the crowsfoot. A very simple maiden she was always, and took great delight in these simple things. When they reached the last hill within sight of Marylands, she turned round and looked back on the pretty meadows, saying, with a heavy sigh,

“Oh, how happy I have been this morning!”

Ninian answered, softly, “And I, too!”

“If it could but be always so,” cried Hope, with another sigh. “If I could only escape from this hard, hard life, and earn my bread, no matter how, or fly away and hide myself at The Gowans.”

“Will you come?” said he, suddenly, but in a deep tremulous voice, whose passion he thought any one must have understood. Whether, despite his resolution, he meant Hope to understand, he himself scarcely knew. But he said the words, and waited.

"I come? How can I?" she answered, sadly. She had not comprehended him in the least! His great depth of love was hidden far below the vision of her mild eyes. He must wait a little longer yet before chance smote asunder the smooth waters, and let her see the treasure which lay buried there.

"I mean," said he, with that soft kindness which marked his every action, every word with 'the child,'—"if you could come to us for a little while."

"Oh! that I could! Then I should be quiet and safe—far out of the way of—Ah! sometimes I think I cannot bear up much longer. It is so hard! If I could but have had you near to help me, my brother!"

She sobbed this out, as if her poor heart could restrain itself no longer. And then she hung her head in shame, and accused herself of having grievously erred. "But I have had nobody to speak to—nobody!—and now, seeing you, this came out unawares. And I have told nothing that you may not soon know."

"All that I know now is, that my little

Hope is unhappy. What makes her so? Can I do her any good?"

"Oh no—no! I ought not to have said thus much. If my father heard—— No, I will not say any more," added she, interrupting herself, and summoning resolution to her brow, and a faint smile to her lips, "I dare say I shall be content before long."

"My child!" said Ninian, firmly, "for you are *my* child—*my* darling—as well as your father's daughter—I have on you some little claim."

He thought he had, or would have when she learned all. This made him speak, lest she should wear her heart away in home-troubles, and he not know it. Sooner than that, he would run the chance of startling her calm affection by telling her that his love was not what it seemed, and bidding her take shelter from all her cares on her betrothed husband's breast. For some lingering of that reverence with which the son of a worthy father inclines to regard all fathers, bad or good, made him resolve

that he would never steal Mr. Ansted's daughter from him unawares.

These thoughts—clear, but quick as lightning—darted through Ninian's mind, as he spoke of his "claim." He paused a moment upon the word, and then continued,

"I think, dear Hope, you might tell me your trouble. You know I was acquainted with all your father's affairs."

"And are you now?" cried Hope, eagerly.

"No, not now ; but I can guess." And then, to soothe the pain he thought her delicacy might feel, he added : "You may be sure that all I guess or learn I shall hold sacred ; and Hope might trust me, since she chose me for her brother."

But Hope, even at this, continued silent ; though she pressed his hand gratefully. Ninian drew back, his conscience and his pride accusing him for seeking to pry into another man's secrets. He could not have done so, except for the sake of her whose peace was dearer to him than anything in the world, except honour.

Something of this latter feeling rose up

and lessoned him into silence; setting before him the example of Mr. Ansted's daughter, who was a true daughter, even to a Mr. Ansted. He followed her down the garden, for from some unexpressed reason, Hope had dropped his arm on entering the lodge-gates. But whatever she did, and whatever she said, or left unsaid, he felt that he could only reverence her the more.

Mr. Ansted was lounging over his newspapers, or staring with sleepy eyes at the pictures which adorned his drawing-room. And there, listening patiently to his comments on the same, and his attempts to assume the reputation of a man of taste by having "stepped into the shoes" of the late proprietor of this pretty house—sat Ninian Græme, a cheerful martyr, for two long hours. He thought it was hard if he could not bear for half a day what his darling had to bear for a whole lifetime.—No, not a whole lifetime, if it pleased God! The gentle little bird should have a peaceful nest yet. He would make all soft and fair for her before he stirred her quiet heart, or made her

present home more bitter by the father's opposition, and then he would come and take his sweet dove home.

He knew—something in his heart told him—that she would be content to go. True, she did not love as he did, perhaps never might,—he could hardly expect it, with his plain looks, and thick-coming grey hairs. But he thought that any woman so pure and true must feel her heart respond to such a passionate and entire devotion as his own. Yes! she would not be unhappy with him, even though she was so young and beautiful, and he—Well, he was whatever God had made him! He forgot the time when he had been half fearful lest she should suffer by vainly loving him—so inconsistent are all men, or, at least, all lovers. But now that he felt his joy and hope grow nearer, and his self-conflict closing fast, there came upon him all those doubts and bitter humiliations which ever follow and torture true love—the truer the love, the greater being the suffering.

Ninian's *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Ansted being

ended, there came dinner, the fortunate interval which killed at least two hours of a dreary Sunday afternoon. So it seemed in this household, where during all the long Sabbath day the servants toiled and grumbled, and the master yawned. He brightened up however at feeding-time, and gave his whole soul to what unto him seemed the chief aim and purpose of existence—dining. To do him justice, he was not unsocial. His heart warmed as his mouth filled, and he seemed quite unsatisfied unless his guest and his daughter ate and drank in proportionate companionship. But Ninian had all his life been thoroughly disregarding of table luxuries; and Miss Ansted sat, her plate loaded with expensive dainties, her glass filled with the most costly wines,—though at times, when her father dilated upon the immense sum these Lucullian delights had cost him,—she looked as if every mouthful she tasted was like poison. A factory child sitting by the road-side, munching her honest, hard-earned crust, would have had a happier feast than this poor girl.

But yet she sat at the laden board, did her duties as hostess, and perhaps no eye save that which watched her with such close tenderness, might have seen that she had any thought beyond. Only when the bells began to ring for evening service, she rose up as if eager for the relief.

“You are not going to church to-night, Miss A.? Pray, give up your religious duties for once, and amuse us?” said the father, yawning over his wine. “Or at all events, amuse your old friend Mr. Græme, for I declare I am so confoundedly tired and sleepy.”

“Will you lie down and rest, papa, or shall I make you some tea?”

“Tea—nonsense! I know the best cure—a hair of the dog that bit me last night—eh? Take away these detestable wines, Hope, and give me some brandy-and-water. Then I think I’ll try to doze, and you can take Mr. Græme into the drawing-room and sing psalms for him (she has a splendid piano, cost 100 guineas, I vow). Only mind and shut the door.”

So while Mr. Ansted slumbered off his *gourmandise*, Ninian and Hope sat together in the drawing-room, which breathed another atmosphere than that out of which they passed. It was a sweet room, thickly hung with pictures, strewn with all sorts of fantastic, tasteful ornaments. A few hyacinths in glasses created an abiding perfume, faint but delicious; other scents came wafted in at times through the half-opened door of the conservatory which led out of the apartment. The fire sparkled out from a hearth made gay by painted china tiles, and glimmered with a softened light on two exquisite heads, "Night" and "Morning," which formed the supporters of the white marble chimney-piece.

All these things Ninian's eye noted with a curious tenacity that fixed on his memory that room and all its appertainings. In after years he could at any moment have conjured it up, just as it looked then, in the dim firelight, especially these pale marble heads, against one of which, "Night," Hope was leaning. They seemed very like—the

statue face and the human face—both so rarely delicate and fair, with the shut eyelids and the weary look about the mouth, as if sleep were welcome.

“Are you tired, Hope? You surely are not strong. Yet you looked so well yesterday that I quite forgot what I heard of your having been ill, on account of which your father came to live here.”

“He said so—did he?”

“Yes. Were you very ill, my child? Was that the reason you did not write for so many weeks? Had I known, I—we—should all have been unhappy.”

“You need not,” said Hope. She paused—and meeting his anxious gaze, cast down her eyes in shame. “Don’t look at me. I cannot keep up a deceit before *you*. What was said was not true;—I have never been ill at all. But it was a good reason for leaving—and we were obliged to leave.”

Her look—so sad, so humbled—seemed to indicate, “Don’t ask me any more!” Ninian did not ask.

He tried to talk to her of other things; it

was very painful to him to see her sitting there, with her sad face, which at every kind word of his appeared to grow sadder,—and to know that he must not say to her as of old, “My child, what ails you?” He would fain do her good, and cheer her without her knowing it; so, in his old merry way, he bade her not sit drooping there, but come and show him the wonders of her conservatory.

Hope obeyed, with something of the ready smile with which she obeyed him of old. Mr. Græme attempted a long botanical conversation—varied by references to his own pet garden at home—and then stood at Hope’s side, pointing out, as he was wont to point out to her all pretty objects of nature when she was his pupil—how graceful the trees of the pleasure-ground looked, stretching up their bare branches against the bright line of horizon, almost like a summer sunset.

“Do you stay here all summer? It must be a sweet place then?” said Ninian, as seeing her shiver he turned back into the

warm drawing-room. "Indeed, it is a sweet place now. I don't think I ever saw a more beautiful room than this."

"It seems to me frightful!" cried Hope. "Oh, I wish it were the bare walls—the bare floor. I wish we lived in any hovel, however poor, so that we lived there honestly!" And she burst into tears.—They were not child's tears now; Ninian could not comfort them as he had used to do. He saw them flow—large, silent tokens of a woman's heavy grief and humiliation.

He made her sit down and took her hand. "Now, Hope, after this, you must tell me all."

"Must I?—do you say so? Do you think it would be right? Sometimes I have thought it would, because you were my father's friend—that is, you knew my father. Perhaps you could give me advice, or, at least, inform me of something. I am all in the dark. He will not tell me, though I have begged him to do so, almost on my knees."

Hope said this hurriedly, as if frightened

at her own revelations. And then, from a sort of feeling that now she had begun she must go on, she looked at Ninian with an eager entreaty. "Tell me, for I am so miserable—do you know anything of my father's affairs? Is he a rich man, or is he not?"

And when Ninian answered in the only way he could, as to his utter ignorance in the matter, it was piteous to see how dejectedly she sank back, and appealed to him no more.

Mr. Græme did not know whether to speak on or be silent. His position was as painful as any man's could well be. But Hope, throwing herself on the footstool by his side, looked up with her trusting, child-like look, and cried, "I feel so unhappy—so guilty. Help me—do help me, my brother." Then he knew his course was plain. He must save the child, without any scruples of delicacy with regard to the father.

He took the little hands—the hands that it was his life's prayer to clasp thus fast for ever—and said, "*I will* help you, Hope. I

think I understand what you mean to imply. But how was it that you never hinted anything of these——” he hesitated for a word, “these troubles of your father’s?”

“I did not know them myself. We first lived as we do now, or more expensively if possible. He told me to spare nothing in the house, he made me wear rich dresses, and gave me, oh! such jewellery! I took it, and was pleased—but now the very sight of it makes me blush for shame.”

“My dear Hope! it is no shame to you.”

“It is—it is! Think of living in a fine house, and having rich dinners every day, and going about in a carriage, knowing that we have no right to these things, because they are not paid for, and perhaps never may be.”

Very low she spoke, and bitter was the shame that dyed her young face crimson.

“I think,” she went on, “that I should never have let you know this, except that you have influence with my father; you might help him by your advice. If he feels as I do, he must be very miserable too.”

“Did he ever say so? Did he ever tell you of his circumstances in any way? Have you any knowledge of where his income comes from—and how much it is? Forgive me—but if I am to do you any good, I must speak, and you must answer, in this business-like way.”

Hope thought a little, and then said, “I know absolutely nothing. Except”—and she blushed, possibly with shame at the supposed falsehood—“except that he told Mr. Ulverston he had estates in America that were increasing every year, and that I should be the richest girl in England before long. And Mr. Ulverston and all my friends consider me so, while I know quite well that it cannot be—that my father is mistaken, or perhaps, fancies the thing he wishes, as people do sometimes. And then all the while I am deceiving everybody. Oh, if only *he* would but believe the truth!”

“You mean your father?” said Ninian. In his anxiety he did not notice that the girl slightly drew back, without answering.

“Your father ought to believe how little Hope cares for being an heiress. Still,”—and a sudden light broke upon Mr. Græme’s mind—“perhaps he expects that with this reputation of wealth his daughter will marry.”

“His daughter will not, though.” And for the first time Ninian saw a faint tincture of pride in that meek brow. “Nothing shall make me deceive any man thus. Fancy, only fancy, for him to suppose his wife a rich heiress, and then find her out to be—what I am!”

Ninian looked at her, her face of truth, her mien sorrowful, yet so sweet. He thought there was never a man living who would not rejoice to wed—what she was.

“Sometimes,” added Hope, lifting her face and then lowering it again—“sometimes, I own—if I must tell all my foolish thoughts to my brother—I have fancied it would be better for me to marry, to go into some new home, rather than live on this wretched, deceitful life.”

"You must not do that, Hope," said Ninian, hurriedly. "Give me your solemn promise that you will not!"

"Very well," said Hope, and faintly smiled. "Perhaps, after all, I may never be tried. I often pray for that ending. Better anything than deceit. You yourself would teach me the same." And she raised her eyes, so trustful, pure, and unconscious, that Ninian could not do what more than once he was about to do—open his arms and say, "My love—my wife—come home to me!"

There was a silence; the light from the windows darkened; the fire sunk lower, making the white marble faces seem spectral and strange. Once more poor little Hope looked up at her adopted brother, and said, "Help me!"

Ninian roused himself to think clear thoughts, and try to act like a world-wise man for his darling's good. He asked many questions that he fancied might lead him to a right knowledge of the truth, but her answers were as simple as a child's.

"You see, I knew nothing of money-mat-

ters," said she, helplessly. "I tried to learn, and to be papa's housekeeper, as I am now. At first he gave me money every week, and I did very well, and paid everybody. And then he said I must send the bills to him, and he would pay them. But papa is not very particular, and thinks tradesmen ought to wait. At last he grew angry whenever I asked him for money; and all these people used to be coming to me, and I could give them nothing but promises and kind words. They were very rude to me sometimes, but I was only sorry; it was so hard for them. Once I went and sold some of my ornaments to pay my dressmaker, because she was too poor to wait until papa's money came in. It must come in very slowly, otherwise, I think—I hope—he would pay everybody. Perhaps I am very wrong in telling these things, but, oh! I have so suffered!"

"My poor child! And when was all this?—at Chester-terrace?"

"Yes! How dreadful the place grew, and the neighbourhood! I used to think as I

walked along the streets that the people were staring and pointing at me, as being somebody who owed money and did not pay. I durst not pass the tradespeople's doors; I felt ashamed that anybody should see me. And then to come home and seem rich—to go out and spend money, knowing how much we owed. Oh ! what a dreadful life it was !”

“ And all the while my poor Hope wrote her cheerful letters, and I never knew a word of this !”

“ You never would, nor anybody, but that I am so unhappy, and feel as I were so dishonest. I thought we were coming to live in the country quietly, that papa might save money and pay all his debts. And you see—you see !”

Her eyes glanced round the rich drawing-room as if it were disgusting to her sight. Then she covered her face, in such humiliation as those only suffer who pure and honourable themselves, have to lead the hollow life this poor girl led — upright daughter of one who was—there was no gainsaying it—a dishonest man.

Ninian was very near uttering the epithet, when something in Hope's manner stopped him. He only said, with a little sternness, for his conscientious nature was sorely tried,

"I guessed that this would happen. I knew your father years ago."

Hope answered, humbly, "Don't think anything hard of him—at least, not very hard. He does not mean to act wrongly. Perhaps he would pay if he could. He may be very poor. Oh, if he would only tell me so, and let us go and live in a little cottage, and pay for everything we had, or not have it at all, I think I should be happy then. Hark! was that my father coming?"

"No; only a step outside the house. The servants coming in from church, perhaps. Don't look so frightened, my poor child."

"Did I look frightened? Everything startles me now. Do you know, the week before we left Chester-terrace we had to keep the doors bolted, and papa never dared to stir out, lest—— Oh, I can't tell it, I feel so ashamed!"

From her words, Ninian began to see on

what a precipice his darling stood. He took his resolution immediately. There could be no consideration for any one but her.

"Hope," he said, after some moments of thought, "I fancy I have some influence over your father. I will speak to him, and learn from him the true state of his affairs, which seem to be in a very critical position."

"And you will be kind to him, and help him all you can?"

"I will, for your sake. Cheer up, my child, my pet," said he, taking in his hand one of the brown curls he used to like playing with. But he soon let it go ; either his own feelings or Hope's drew a veil between them, so as to prevent the little fondnesses that were their wont of old.

Still, he said to himself that this was only for a while. He might yet longer have stood aloof from Miss Ansted the heiress, but he felt that the ruined bankrupt's daughter might soon be taken to his heart and home. Even Lindsay would have advised so. He would wait until he returned to Edinburgh,

and could tell that true elder sister all, as was indeed her right to hear. It was the last fraternal sacrifice he had need to make. Then he would come back, bringing Lindsay's own welcome to the wife her brother had chosen.

Thinking thus, he was not pained even when Hope slowly rose from her lowly and loving position at his feet. Ere her father came in, she was again Miss Ansted, silent and distant, though always kind.

CHAPTER X.

— STILL the same Sunday night ! How long, or rather how full of successive feelings which seem to lengthen time, had that Sunday been to Ninian Græme !

Hope was gone to bed ; at least she had retired, leaving her father and her friend to talk together ; but from the anxious look which Ninian caught as she passed out of the room, he knew there would be no sleep for those poor weary eyes. He remembered how more than once when she was recovering from the fever, he had chanced to come into the study and find her sleeping. What a calm, sweet look she had ! If he could but take her and shelter her from care, and bring back that restful, happy look once more ! And all the man was stirred

within him in a mingling of passion and tenderness, so that he saw nothing but the image of his dreams, and took no notice of the coarse, burly likeness before him—an elderly Bacchus, puffing away in the *dolce far niente* of a Sunday night.

“D——d bad cigars,” said Mr. Ansted, who, it should be remarked, was never quite so gentlemanly after dinner as before. He put his manners on like his coats, and cast them off in like fashion,—when they were too tight a fit and cramped his natural peculiarities. “The most confounded trash I ever smoked; and yet I pay a pretty price for them too.”

“So you seem to do for everything you have about you. You have a good share of the elegancies of life.”

“Of course! I like enjoyment. I pay my money and I get its worth. There is no harm in that, I suppose?”

“Certainly not. A man who pays his way in the world has a right to the best the world can give him.”

Ninian, who, absorbed in other thoughts, had not quite considered what he was saying, nor meant to point his words so sar-

castically—saw how his host winced under their application.

He was in a most uncomfortable position. To eat a man's dinners, and then take him to task for something very like dishonesty, was a thing extremely abhorrent to Mr. Græme. Yet he had a true and not unfriendly purpose to fulfil towards his former debtor; and if what he had to say was not said that night, the chance might not occur again.

In various delicate ways, he tried to turn the conversation to the old relations between them, as client and legal adviser. He thought Mr. Ansted might become more confidential then. But it is a bad thing to be too well acquainted with some men's past; and though, conscious of the hold that Ninian had over him, Hope's father was perfectly bland and civil, yet it was evident that the subject was a disagreeable one.

"Come—we'll not bother our heads with business now, Græme. You used to press me deucedly hard, sometimes; you're a far pleasanter fellow to meet in one's own house over a bottle of wine, than in that musty

old office of yours. Here's to your health, and may you get on in the world, and have as pretty a place of your own as this Maryland of mine. For, by Jove! I like it so much, I intend to buy it. Wouldn't you advise me, eh?"

"I cannot advise, being now thoroughly ignorant of your circumstances and property. Still, be prudent. You know, you were never a very prudent fellow, when I had the management of your matters," said Ninian, taking a good-humoured tone; "but you seem to be flourishing now, to all appearances."

"Appearances! You don't mean to say that it's not so? Bah! I could almost fancy that you came here to look after your own little matters. I vow, the paltry sum had slipped my memory. But you shall have it in—let me see—a bill of three months? How much is it, interest and all?" With a contemptuous air, he leaned back, puffed away, and tried to assume the careless dignity of a man of property.

Ninian's pride rose. "Look you, Mr. Ansted; I never should have mentioned this subject if you had not. The sum you owe

me you can pay when you choose—I shall never ask you. But, though I am no longer your business-agent and have nothing to do with your present affairs, I can't help feeling an interest in them."

"Very much obliged. Then you will be delighted to know that all is prospering with me. My daughter, when she marries (and a certain young fellow of my acquaintance, of good family and estate, would be glad if that were to be to-morrow)—my daughter will have 50,000*l.* down, or property equivalent. A splendid alliance; and you shall draw up the settlements, eh, Græme?"

Ninian's fears, ever alive, made him blench a little. "This is news! Does Miss Ansted know it, or consent to it?"

"Pooh! Of course she'll consent. It is the best offer she has had, to my knowledge, and she has refused some very good ones. A very taking girl is Hope; just what I could have expected my daughter to be. And she'll have a pretty penny of her own some of these days; one or two of my American plantations—besides this little place of Marylands. What do you think of it, Græme? I shall lay out a thousand or two upon it, and then,

'pon my life ! it will be the prettiest residence in the county."

He said all this with such a frank, plausible air, that Ninian began to doubt whether he himself had not been labouring under a delusion. Never was there a man who had so completely the gift of making black appear white, or who by his supreme assurance was better fitted to sustain the difficult *rôle* of an adventurer.

"Have you bought the house?" asked Mr. Græme, half believing in his own question.

"Not yet ; but I shall do, knick-knackeries and all. The poor devil who collected them—he was an author, or an artist, or some such shabby profession—will be glad enough to sell everything, Ulverston says. He took Marylands for me, and I came at once, though my former lease was not quite out. But money's no object, compared with comfort."

"You removed suddenly, I believe. I was inquiring for you on Friday at Chester-terrace," said Ninian, determined to find out the truth.

Mr. Ansted gave him a searching glance.

“ You — you heard nothing there ? The truth is,” added he, receiving no immediate answer, “ I was not sorry to leave no address. Some trifling annoyances—you understand ? —such as a gentleman is always subject to when his property is much tied up. But nothing of any consequence—easily remedied by a little loose cash. I shall settle the matters in a week or so. You couldn’t”—and here Mr. Ansted seemed struck by a sudden idea—“ you couldn’t oblige me with a hundred or two, just for a few days, to get these things over ? ”

He had overshot his mark ; his astuteness was not equal to his plausibility. The clear-sighted Scotsman saw through him now.

“ Mr. Ansted,” said Ninian, firmly, though not unkindly, and conquering the repulsion that would arise, “ if I had that sum to lend, which I have not, I should be slow to employ it thus. It seems to me that it would be like pouring in a bucketful of sand to stop up a river.”

“ What do you mean to insinuate ? ” cried the other, rising up, irate. But he met the quiet look which had controlled him many a time. Somehow, from old experience, he

felt it would not do to get into a passion with Ninian Græme. He knocked out the ashes of his cigar, and sat down again.

“I mean to insinuate nothing; but I think, now we are upon this topic, it is but honest to tell you what I heard that night, and what, drawing my own conclusions since, I see good reasons for believing,—that you are in very considerable embarrassments.”

“You are a——” The epithet, noun and adjective included, were not altogether as graceful and gentlemanlike as they might have been. They made Ninian’s Scottish blood rise up in fire, but it was cooled by one thought—the only thought that could have made him act and speak as he now did, though the task was so repugnant to his feelings that more than once he doubted whether he was justified therein. Again he seemed to hear the entreating voice—“Ah! do help me! do talk with my father!”

“I am sorry to have annoyed you, Mr. Ansted, nor shall I urge in apology any claims I might have upon your confidence.”

“Confidence! You insulted me, sir.”

“I trust not, when I am now sitting under

your own roof, where I have been a guest these two days. It is very unpleasant to me to mention these things at all ; but having been your legal adviser, and wishing still to be your friend, I cannot help warning you that these reports are afloat. If they be at all true, and the same thing happens again that happened some years ago, your position would turn out very difficult and hard to be retrieved."

Mr. Ansted looked alarmed. He was not the bravest man in the world, and knew that Ninian Græme had some power over him, which might be wielded to his hurt. It was not safe to make such an enemy. His pompous manner lowered into something very like cajoling.

"Come, now, you're an^d old friend, and I'll not deceive you, such a lynx-eyed fellow as you seem. Things have^d gone rather up hill with me of late; but I shall retrieve them all if I can only keep up my credit until I get under the wing of my^s son-in-law elect, young Ulverston."

"It was he, then, whom^e you meant?"

"To be sure. An excellent match for Hope, and a great advantage to me. Also,

don't you see that he's mad after the girl—quite mad. I expect every day he will offer himself—and then, by Heaven! whether she likes it or not, I'll have them married at once, and make all safe.”

The brandy-and-water must certainly have unloosed Mr. Ansted's tongue a little, or he could not have been thus communicative. In a moment Ninian discerned the whole farrago of lies—the 50,000*l.*—the grand settlement—the gilded cheat by means of which Hope was to be lifted out of her own sphere by a husband whom her father thought aristocratic. If, in that manly heart there had been nothing tenderer than pity, it would have throbbed in behalf of the innocent girl. But with that intense love stirring its depths, it was thrilled with a passion too strong for control.

“ Now, by the God that made me—I say, Ralph Ansted, before you shall sell your own child in that way, I will do——”

“ What?”

“ That which will prevent it. I will go and tell Ulverston what I know,—and you are well aware I know it,—how that you are a man overwhelmed by debt, hunted from

Scotland to America, from America to England; that at this moment you hardly dare cross your own threshold for fear of the law!"

Mr. Ansted never answered; he was dumb either with fear or rage.

"Now, this is what I have to say to you," continued Ninian, in a voice less stern and very quiet. "Be an honest man, give up all to your creditors, and I will help you as I helped you before. My own claims, I told you, I shall never urge or think of. All I want is to save you and yours from the wretchedness and disgrace that must come upon you, if you go on living your present life. You know, some time or other, the crash must come."

"Let it come!" shouted out the enraged adventurer, with a fierce oath; and then, hurling out many more, he ordered Ninian to quit the house.

This was not the raving of a drunken man, for though slightly excited, he was by no means intoxicated. It was the ebullition of a man roused from the smooth ease of selfishness to perfect ferocity. No person could have withstood it, except one who

was used to control, not only others but himself, as was Ninian Græme.

"I will go at once, if you wish it," said he, as he stood upright, his cheek something whitened with self-restraint, for he had within him all a man's fierce passions and indignant pride. "But I tell you once again, I meant you only kindness; nor shall you force from me one word of anger or disrespect, since you are an older man than I—a father too——"

He remembered *whose* father, and stopped abruptly. Unable to trust himself longer, he walked from the room and towards the hall-door, which he opened with some dim intention of leaving the house immediately, though it was past midnight.

"Mr. Græme—Mr. Græme!" trembled out a terrified voice, and the poor child came creeping down the stairs, dressed just as she had left them. She had evidently made no attempt to go to rest, but had sat all these hours watching.

"Mr. Græme, where are you going? Oh, I hope you have had no quarrel with my father! Come back again!—ah, do!" She was so child-like ever, with her "Ohs!"

and "Ahs!" and broken words. And with the action of a frightened child she hung upon Ninian, drawing him back into the house—not towards the room where her father was, but towards the drawing-room. It was almost dark, there being only a few red embers left of the fire. By this glimmer Ninian could scarcely see Hope, but he felt the light grasp of her cold hands, which never once let him go. He felt also that she was trembling all over. She was never made for a heroine, but for one of those timid, clinging women, whom, in most cases, are by men loved best.

Ninian put his arm round her, for she could hardly stand. "Do not be afraid, Hope, there is nothing the matter. I spoke to your father, and made him angry; he wishes me to go away; and so I will."

He had had some ado to repress his own impetuous mood, and his spirit vibrated still beneath the smothered storm. People who let their passions rage, and burst, and cease, know little of this fearful inward war, which tears and destroys the body, even though the mind sits calmly—a king on a ruined throne.

“I can’t let you go—I dare not. I know something is about to happen. Only stay till morning!”

“Impossible! I wish I had never spoken to your father at all—nor subjected myself to this. I have, at least, some manly feeling—some sense of right. I must leave the house indeed!”

Somehow he could not look at Mr. Ansted’s daughter. He felt that all along this love had cost his pride and manhood dear.

“You are angry. You will leave me, and never see me again—me, your poor child, that I thought you cared for,” said Hope, as her hands dropped from him.

“I not care for you? Oh, my God, Thou knowest the truth,” groaned he, half inaudible. He was about to stretch his arms—snatch at the dim figure that seemed gliding away—draw it close to his heart, that silently in the darkness she might feel, as she must feel, how the love where-with she thought he loved her, was as nothing compared to the strong pulse of passion that now beat in his bosom.

If this had chanced—if her unconscious heart, tender and grateful ever, had wakened

up to such knowledge, who can tell what might have been? "*Might have been!*" So mourn we often, forgetting that life is one eternal "to be," which we cannot alter. The chance of a moment—the turning of a straw—seem to do or undo all. But only *seem*; since there works underneath the Infinite Will—which we shall one day know to have been as far above our human will as heaven is above earth.

Ninian, wildly extending his arms, that quivered and trembled with their great strength of love, heard a noise and a struggle. Hope heard it too. Crying out, "They're here—I knew it! They're come to take my father"—she fled across the hall, and out of Ninian's sight.

He followed. There stood Mr. Ansted in the grasp of one man, while another was entering by the open hall-door. They were sheriff's officers; the unlucky debtor had been arrested at last.

This unpleasant adventure could not be quite a novelty to Ralph Ansted. He was used to it before. He cursed and swore a little for form's sake, and then yielded, sinking down in his arm-chair and staring

blankly at his foes. His daughter rushed and clung to him; she could not have clung closer had he been the worthiest and tenderest father in the world. But at such time women forget everything save pity and grief.

Ninian, unwilling to meet the fallen countenance of his host, stepped aside and spoke to the men: "This is a sudden proceeding. Where is your warrant?"

"Here, sir; all right—made out for Monday."

"But this is Sunday night; and I thought nobody could be arrested on a Sunday," cried Hope, whose sole legal or worldly knowledge had been thus pitifully taught her.

"You seem as sharp as your father, miss. And I dare say he's had good practice by this time," said the sheriff's officer, rudely. "Pretty work it has been to nab him. But it's done now—all right you see, sir." And he pulled out the writ, together with a great silver watch, which pointed to half-past one. It was really a clever arrest; and the bailiffs chuckled grimly at one another, as, according to all novelists, that much-maligned class invariably do.

Yet the men were probably honest men—honester than their victim; for one of them, when Mr. Ansted sulkily shook off his daughter, said civilly, “Don’t take on, miss,” and would have helped her up from the floor where she knelt, had not Ninian advanced and taken her in his jealous arms.

“Come away,” whispered he, trying to shield his darling from the rude staring of the bailiffs, and of the men and women servants that were now crowding into the room, some frightened, some insolent.

But she would not go, and kept sobbing out, “Papa, papa!” for her strength of mind, never over-great, was weakened by her long hours of solitary watching that night.

“Don’t be a fool, girl,” was all the father vouchsafed to answer. “Have your wits about you; go up-stairs and look me out some clothes.”

At that harsh voice, Hope ceased crying, and became herself, her new self—such as trouble had brought her to be—silent, mechanical, and cold.

Without replying, she obeyed her father, took a light and left the room, followed by that grim horror, the man in possession.

Ninian followed likewise. Wherever she went his watchfulness and his cares were never absent from her. At last she grew very quiet and composed—the poor young mistress of the house, which was now become the house of an arrested debtor, full of clamours, anger, and confusion. She tried to pacify the servants and keep them from insulting her father; she went about getting ready what little things she could for the prisoner's comfort. When at daybreak Mr. Ansted started with his captors, the poor girl went with him to the lodge-gates, and, scarce sheltered from the rain, stood sorrowfully under the tall holly-trees, which looked ghostly in the dawn.

Ninian, who in his quiet way had managed to control everything—making bailiffs civil, and enraged domestics respectful enough to hold their tongues—came and put a shawl over her bare head, that was wet with rain. She turned and hid her face on his shoulder, weeping bitterly.

He could not enfold and comfort her there, for there were other people by who knew he was not her brother. Even when he had drawn her arm through his and taken

her back into the house, something compelled him to respect her trouble, by not saying one word more than brotherly affection might use. But he soothed her with inexpressible gentleness, and arranged everything for her in that now miserable house, so as to save her from all further pain.

“You cannot stay here, Hope; it is impossible.”

“I must! I have to take care of papa’s house and property.”

“You don’t know then, my poor child, that both are no longer his or yours. The law claims everything.”

“I never thought of that. What, will all be lost?—my books, my pretty piano, my plants?” And for a moment she looked sad. “Well! I do not mind; anything is better than to live as we lived. And you will remember your promise, and help my father? I think he said he was sure not to be kept in prison”—she faltered over the shameful word—“for very long. You will manage things for him?” added she, looking up with a full confidence as if everything was secure that was in the hands of Ninian Græme.

“I will do all I can; but I must first get

you safe away from here. Will you"—here he paused,—“will you, dear Hope, come home with me at once to Lindsay?”

“Not yet,” said she ; “ I cannot—I ought not.”

And Ninian, the more he longed, the more he forbore to urge.

“ I think,” Hope continued, after a long silence, “ that I had best go to Lady Ulverston’s cottage, close by. She will be kind to me, whatever happens ; and I can hide there, and see nobody ; but nobody will come near me now.” She half sighed ; and then added once more, “ Still, I do not mind ; it must come ; I am glad it is over !”

Ninian thought he would rather have left his treasure anywhere than at Lady Ulverston’s. But he contemned himself for such a foolish jealousy, and his worldly knowledge taught him there was not much fear of Mr. Ulverston’s coming a-wooing to the bankrupt’s daughter. Nobody would steal his jewel now.

He rejoiced in her poverty ; he gloried in her utter dependence ; and when a few hours after he took her away from that hateful dwelling, she carrying nothing from it but

the clothes she wore, and her little bundle in her hand, he was content, glad, proud! He felt as if she were already his own. He sat with her in the jolting fly, the Arlington fly, which never went out but the whole village was agog to learn whither,—and the crazy vehicle seemed to him as pleasant as a marriage chariot, bearing away bridegroom and bride. So strangely happy was he, that he had some trouble to hide it all, and look grave enough to meet Hope's sad face. But he knew if there was any power in human love it would not be thus sad for very long.

Mr. Græme had already been and explained all to Sir Peter Ulverston's worthy wife. They saw her standing at the gate of her garden, ready to welcome Miss Ansted.

"I will leave you together," said Ninian, with thoughtful tact. "The best thing I can do is to go up to town at once."

"Ah! that is kind. You will be sure to see my father? And—one thing more, if it will not trouble you."

"Trouble me! How can you talk so, dear child? What is it?"

She hesitated, and blushed; he thought with shame.

“Our friends must soon know what has happened. If you meet any, tell them. Above all, will you tell Mr. Ulverston? He was to have come down to-morrow, and I had rather not see him, nor anybody.”

“You shall not, dear. You shall rest safe for a few days, until I fetch Lindsay, and we both come and take you home.”

She smiled painfully, but did not answer a word one way or the other.

The carriage was drawing up to Lady Ulverston’s gate. “One minute, love—one minute. Look at me! Tell me that you are not unhappy—that you trust in me!”

“Ah, yes! How could I not?”

“You are sure you will be content and safe here, even if I do not see you for three or four days? I want to bring Lindsay, you know. She will take care of you, perhaps better than I.”

“Ah, that could not be!” murmured the grateful, loving voice, as Hope held out both her hands to her faithful friend.

He kissed them, one after the other. He thought she must have felt—perhaps he wished her to feel—that the touch which burned on them was no brother’s kiss. But

she showed no surprise either in word or sign ; a minute after she was looking out of the window, smiling, or trying to smile, at Lady Ulverston.

Ninian lifted her out of the carriage, watched her turn on the door-step to give him one affectionate look more, then leaped back into his place, and drove on to London.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. GRÆME'S first visit on reaching town, was whither he knew Hope would have wished him first to go—to her father.

The interior of a sponging-house is no novelty—it has been painted by most of our modern tale-writers ; by many from observation ; by some, unlucky souls ! from experience. Therefore it will be sufficient to say that the scene was a sponging-house, and nothing more.

Therein Ninian found the arrested insolvent eating a hearty and expensive breakfast out of a service of wretched delf. It must be a very great degree of affliction that could blunt Mr. Ansted's appetite, and a still greater need that would stand in the way of his indulging it. Nor did he seem much cast

down by his position; he gave orders to the slatternly young Jewess who waited with as imperious an air as he did to his footmen at Marylands.

“Come in, Græme; don’t hang about the door in that fashion. Bah! did you never before see a gentleman in difficulties?” said he to Ninian; who, remembering what had passed between them the previous night, felt a certain delicacy at making his presence known. He need not have feared. Self-importance is the best proof-armour, and the greatest ass alive would abstain from kicking at the expected lifter-off of his burdens—until they were removed.

So Mr. Ansted was very civil to his visitor.

Ninian was glad of this. It made his way more plain. He was even softened to compassion when he looked round the miserable debtor’s lodging, and thought of his darling’s father shut up in such a place.

“I am come to talk with you, Mr. Ansted,” said he, when, the breakfast-things being despatched, they two were left together, in as much solitude as was possible in such a den—when the noise and oaths of

a motley crew of inmates resounded from every room in the house. "I wish to see if I can do anything for you, to put your affairs in order."

"Hang my affairs! Let them take their chance, so as I can only get out of here," grumbled Mr. Ansted. "If that knave who found me out at Marylands is not quieted somehow to-day, he'll be spreading the matter, and I shall have all my other creditors coming down upon me like a swarm of bees. Now, if some worthy fellow would only help me to hush the matter up, and get home to-night. I've a dinner-party to-morrow, by Jove!"

Ninian opened his eyes in an astonishment that proved him to be, for a man of the world, exceedingly ignorant as regarded the ways of dishonesty. "Why, I thought, even from your own confession, that your affairs were irretrievably confused—that in fact you were over head and ears in debt?"

"So I am; but many a fellow has to keep afloat in that way all his life, and I have only to do it for a little while. Confound it— isn't it hard that a gentleman like me, just about to go into Parliament — Ulverston

promised me his interest in one of the northern counties, but that's a secret yet—should be annoyed by a parcel of beggarly tradesmen? Why can't they wait my convenience? Of course, when my income comes in regularly, I shall pay them all."

"I trust so," said Ninian, briefly. He was not prone to administer moral lectures, nor, had he been so, was this the time, place, or subject, for such a proceeding.

The Jew handmaiden here entered with a box of cigars, which she said the "gen'leman" had ordered, and for which the money must be paid instant. Mr. Ansted threw down a sovereign.

"The last! There it goes. So, 'pon my life and soul, my worthy old friend, you must set your wits to work and get me out to-night, or the matter will become unpleasant. I can't let my house and furniture go to the devil—or the Sheriffs' Court, and for want of a little ready money."

"I do not understand you," said Ninian Græme; and his cold, clear, searching eye was fixed on the debtor, as at last he forced himself to speak the bare truth without any scruple. "All I know is, that a man,

situated as I know you to be, has but one honest course to pursue; he must give up himself and his property, and go through the Insolvent Court. This is what I came to advise with you upon. I don't myself practise in your English law; but I have friends here who, at my request, will assist you in every way. Now, be frank with me, and tell me what are your assets, and who are your creditors? If the thing must be, we had best get it over at once."

"Come, come, my good fellow, it is impossible. You can't mean what you say. Give up my pretty house? I might not meet such another for a dozen years. And, think of the disgrace! Bah! the Insolvent Court is very well for common people—but for a gentleman! After my difficulties in Edinburgh, too, when you Scotch were so cursedly hard with me! The plan is ridiculous, and I'll have nothing to say to it."

"Then, I can neither advise nor further any other," said Ninian, half rising. But he saw Mr. Ansted's quick alarm, and sat down again. While there was a chance left, he could not renounce Hope's father. "How-

ever, before I go, may I hear what is your intended course in this emergency?" said he, with a conciliatory air.

People out-blown with their own conceit are like air-bladders under water; the moment you take your restraining hand from them, up to the surface they rise. Mr. Ansted was himself again immediately.

"I'll tell you what I shall do," said he, crossing his legs, and playing with the handsome diamond ring which adorned his rather clumsy hand. "To go through the Court is quite impossible. To be sure, I must settle a few of my little annoyances, those fellows are so insatiable. A thousand or two will do it, for the present. Now if any good-natured friend would advance the money, just for a few months, on profitable interest—say ten per cent.—eh?"

"If you mean me," said Ninian, "I have before told you, Mr. Ansted, I will not be a party to any arrangement of that kind."

"Don't inconvenience yourself, pray," said the other, importantly. "I know many others who would be only too happy. My friend Ulverston for instance, except that one wouldn't exactly like to explain these

matters to a gentleman who is about to become one's son-in-law. I wish he was so now, and then I should not be shut up in this d—d unpleasant hole. They might have been married by this time, I'll bet, if that simpleton of a girl had not behaved herself, as she does to every one, so confoundedly proud and shy."

Had the man been any one but Hope's father, the chances are that Nlnian would have indulged in the impulse, and probably the act, of rising up and knocking him down. But on second thoughts, these words imparted a strange joy. She was then "proud" and "shy" to all other men; she, his darling, who sat at his feet, who wept on his shoulder, who looked up to him with loving eyes! Perhaps, after all, it would not be so difficult and new a lesson to teach her, when he said, "My wife, love me!"

For a moment, he suffered himself to pause and dream, until even this foul place grew fair, or was for the time forgotten. When he drew his hand from before his eyes, much of his stern business look was gone.

"Come, Græme, you'll act a friend's part," said Mr. Ansted, stooping to polite con-

descension; “no one ever loses anything by serving *me*, I assure you. Supposing you have not the money yourself—you Edinburgh writers are poor as rats, I know—still, you might have a client or two, who wished to employ their money advantageously.”

“No,” said Ninian, firmly. “It would go against my judgment, first; and, in the second place, would only lead you deeper into debt. Take my advice—it is not for the first time, you know—meet your difficulties like a brave man. Pay your creditors out of what estate you have, get free, and start anew. You will have no family cares; your sons are dead, and your daughter——” He hesitated, and a faint impulse moved him, but was quelled. He could not first utter the long-cherished secret of his love in such a place, and to such ears. “Your daughter, I can engage, will be taken charge of by my sister Lindsay, for any length of time you choose.”

“Very much obliged!” answered Mr. Ansted, with a slight sneer; “but that does not suit my purpose. My daughter, as I told you, will marry into a high family very

soon. If you and Miss Græme are so greatly interested in her welfare, the best thing you can do to advance it, is what I told you. Only assist me in procuring the money to stop these fools' mouths, and, by Heaven! I'll have the wedding in a month."

Ninian rose. "I see it is in vain our talking longer, for I cannot serve you in any way; at least, in the way you desire. I shall only irritate you," said he, noticing the coarse face growing purple with anger. "I had better go."

"And leave me to spend the night in this horrible den. I'll tell you what, Ninian Græme——" and Mr. Ansted's loud voice burst into a volley of language, impossible to repeat, but which showed the real nature hid within him. It was hard for a man to listen to such, especially from the father of his chosen wife. It might even have made less unselfish love recoil from that tie; many a proud, upright heart has done so. But Ninian never wavered.

He stood and endured these ravings, for Mr. Ansted did indeed rave, when, his pomposity being swept away, the true sense of his position dawned upon his mind—a mind

feeble at the core, as all such generally are. Then Ninian had to meet another trial of firmness—the boaster's abject entreaties. Mr. Ansted now began to see there was but one friend in the world who was able, and from some reason or other—probably he ascribed it to a sense of his own individual merits—was also willing, to help him.

“You ought not to be so hard upon me, Græme. I'm getting an old man, and my sons are dead. My health is not so good as it used to be; hang it! Unless I get all the comforts of life, I shall be in my grave in no time. And then what's to become of my daughter?”

Ninian made no reply.

“Well, if you will not advance me money in a straightforward way, I must just get it how I can. I'll go to the Jews. There's lots of them about this place always. I'll inquire.”

He fumbled about for the ragged bell-pull, but Ninian seized his hand.

“Stay! I can't let you go to destruction in that way. God knows, Mr. Ansted, I would do anything in the world to see you what I wish,” said he, earnestly. And bit-

terly he thought, that he would have given up half his prospects in life, only to know his Hope's father an honest man.

Mr. Ansted stopped and looked curiously at the somewhat agitated countenance of Ninian Græme. "You're very kind, but words are cheap, we know."

"I'll tell you what I will do," said the other, not replying to this coarse speech. "I have no property, as you know. I live from hand to mouth, according as I can. With my large family a year's income hardly lasts the year. But I have been fortunate lately. I have put by a hundred or two—for a purpose I had. If you will renounce the false position you now hold, give up all you have, and make arrangements with your creditors for the future, I will lend you this sum; with which you can start for America, and begin the world again for the third time."

Ninian paused. He knew the sanguine temperament of the man with whom he had to deal—a man ready to catch at any new scheme. He caught at this proposal with avidity.

"Not a bad thought that of yours. You might employ your money worse, too, my dear

fellow. I've a great mind to close with your offer, since you are so pressing. But the sum is very small. Say three hundred, now?"

Ninian turned away. He was giving up in that money a thousand dreams, a thousand joys dear to his manly heart—the new home to which he had resolved to bring his wife, leaving Lindsay mistress of The Gowans—the sweet providings that were to supply that home; the dependence for the present; the hope as to the future. Nay, this sum being renounced, he was not sure whether he would as yet be able to marry at all; in which case, to avoid any fear or restraint in his household, he might have still to keep his secret, and maintain towards Hope the old brotherly relation, which every day cost him more and more of self-control and suffering.

"Still," he mused, "when she comes to know all, and how, if I did this, it was for her father, I think, I think——" And his thought dissolved in a dreamy vision of what her look would be when, one by one, these things were revealed to her. He seemed to see her eyes lifted, clear with joy, and bright with tears. He almost

felt the clinging of her arms round his neck, when, the fulness and infinite sacrifice of his love being known, she would murmur, as she had often done before, but with oh! how different meaning!—"Oh! there never was anybody like you!"

"So you'll not help me with another hundred? Not even if I increase the rate of interest? which will matter little, for I shall easily double and treble my capital in the New World. I shall work my estates—I have them, I assure you, somewhere on the Blue Mountains, only they want clearing. They'll be valuable in another five years. I'll make my fortune, and yours, too, Græme."

"I hope so—the former at least," Ninian answered, gravely. And perhaps, anxious as he was to view Mr. Ansted's character in the least unfavourable light, his aversion became tempered with a sort of pity for a man who might be less wilfully unprincipled than led away by every vague chimera of fortune, and afterwards blinded by selfish appetites which made him sacrifice to a love of luxury every sense of uprightness and honesty.

Still, he was getting an elderly man—and an old age void of honour, is, if unworthy of respect, at least most worthy of pity. Possibly, even if Mr. Ansted had not been Hope's father, the good Ninian would have felt glad thus to give him a chance of retrieval. Having at last made the debtor place everything in his hands, and having spent many hours in arranging business for him, Ninian left him safe in a decent lodging; for Mr. Ansted refused to go near his daughter.

"I'll give her one more chance of hooking her lover, which perhaps might be the better for her father too," said he, with a laugh that grated horribly on Mr. Græme's ears. "Ulverston was to have dined at Marylands to-morrow. I fancy he meant to come to the scratch then. Perhaps he'll go down now, and find Hope at Lady Ulverston's. If the girl only has the sense to smooth matters, she might be married still. Eh, don't you think so? What do you say?"

"Nothing!—Miss Ansted will act as a true woman ought to act," answered Ninian, and changed the conversation.

But he vowed to himself that he would

obey Hope's request—eagerly he remembered it had been her request—and that this same night Mr. Ulverston should be made acquainted with what had occurred at Marylands.

It seemed fated that he should always visit that gentleman's chambers at inopportune hours. This time it was late in the evening, and Mr. Ulverston had gone out to dinner. He would be at home soon, however, his valet said, "as" he added, with something very like a grin, "his master had a very particular appointment that evening. Would the gentleman wait an hour?"

Mr. Græme had very rarely an hour to throw away in his busy life. So he went back to his hotel, and there, sitting in the humble coffee-room (he knew he must be doubly economical now), with the buzz of many men around him, he wrote a long, brotherly letter to his darling, telling her all that he had done, except the transaction between himself and Mr. Ansted. His epistle was full of comfort, counsel, and cheer. Some trouble it cost him, for even its loving hypocrisy was a pain to his honest nature. Perhaps, despite his care, any eye quick to

read humanity might have discerned in every line a smothered, yearning tenderness, more touching than the most passionate love-letter that ever was penned.

He finished at last, and with the letter in his pocket went once more to Mr. Ulverston's.

Still, the young man had not returned. Ninian spent a full half-hour in that richly-furnished bachelor's parlour, where this fortunate possessor of the world's goods disposed of some portion of his valuable existence. Everywhere lay tokens of the gay, free and easy life the rich man led—books, statuettes, and objects of *vertu* being scattered about in that unneat fashion, which marks the absence of a woman's hand in a home.

There were other signs of a bachelor's apartment—fencing foils in a corner, a queer heap which looked like a masquerade costume lying on the sofa, and on the floor a half-soiled pack of cards. An exquisite little desk was open on the table, and about it were strewn heaps of letters, many of them evidently from women, there being two or three different female hands. Ninian felt a sort of shudder lest he might see among them one he knew. But it was not

so; and he was half indignant with himself for having involuntarily glanced towards Mr. Ulverston's property and correspondence. He took up a book, and would not look about him any more. In this abode of a man who had never struggled, at whose feet lay every worldly pleasure, who might go where he chose, do kind actions when he chose—above all, marry when he chose—was a something which contrasted too strongly with Ninian's own position to make him feel quite at rest.

He dropped the book and sat with his head on his two hands, thinking.

Mr. Ulverston at last appeared, bursting in with an impetuosity that proved him not unworthy of Tinie's christening as "The Flash of Lightning."

"The devil! No lights—no supper ready—and Mademoiselle and the rest will be here the minute the play is over. Is that you, Dufour, you lazy fool?"

Had a ghost risen out of the arm-chair instead of honest Ninian Græme, Mr. Ulverston could not have looked more thoroughly aghast. But he never lost his presence of mind or his good manners long.

“Confound it, my dear fellow, is it you that I have been abusing? I beg your pardon, heartily. But who could have recognised you by this light? How stupid my servant is to let the lamp go out.”

“It was my doing, I think; and I ought to apologise for thus intruding, but——”

“You are quite welcome! To be sure, I have a party of acquaintance to supper—not exactly of your sort, I fear, sensible Scotchman as you are, and ‘unco gude,’ as they say in the North—still, will you stay?”

Notwithstanding the polite warmth of his invitation, Mr. Ulverston looked uncomfortable, as if he already heard the rustling of “Mademoiselle’s” silk skirts on the staircase.

“Thank you, I cannot stay; but I wanted to see you for a few minutes—can you spare them?”

“Oh yes, or half an hour, if my guests keep me waiting so long. Sit down, pray. I thought you had been still at Marylands—any news? Our fair friend well, I hope?” said he, with an easy air. One of the chief objections Ninian had to Mr. Ulverston was

the careless tone in which he always spoke of women.

“Miss Ansted is well. It was by her desire I came to you to-night.”

“By her desire. How flattering!” He laughed, but there was a quick flush on his cheek; and, as might be expected, Mr. Ulverston was a man not prone to blushing in general. “Well, go on, deliver the message. But really she need not have troubled you—I should have preferred one of the pretty epistles that come from her fair hands.”

Ninian writhed under the insinuation, even though in his heart of hearts he disbelieved it altogether. Hope, with her delicate feelings, with the terror she seemed to express lest Mr. Ulverston should offer her marriage, would never surely have written to him, or only by some trivial, unavoidable chance.

“She bade me,” continued Mr. Græme, anxious to begin the subject of his visit, and thereby end it the sooner,—“she bade me inform you of the misfortune which has happened to her father.”

“What—anything sudden? A fit of apoplexy, perhaps? I always thought it

would be so." And Mr. Ulverston's eyes sparkled with something very like satisfaction.

"No, not exactly; Mr. Ansted is alive and well."

"Really! But, between ourselves, if this *had* occurred—Poh! what a fellow that Ansted is to be the father of such a charming girl! So he is neither dead nor dying?"

"No, but something that to many men seems worse. He is ruined."

Mr. Ulverston started, and a slight discomposure was visible on his face. "You don't say so? Why, not three days ago the fellow was telling me—— Impossible! It can't be true."

"It is. *I* say it," was Ninian's answer. He could be dignified now and then.

Mr. Ulverston made no reply. For once, he seemed to lose control over himself. His colour flushed and went; he bit his lips, and his manner was that of a man extremely irritated and annoyed.

"Upon my soul, this is news! And are you sure of it? Quite ruined, did you say?" Many a rich fellow who lives freely is at times pressed for money—I have been so

myself—but that is not being *ruined*.—Just explain old Ansted's predicament, will you?"

"Simply this;—he has been living beyond his means; last night he was arrested; his debts prove to be much more than by any means he can pay, and I have induced him to go through the Insolvent Court."

"The devil you have!" muttered the other. "But the disgrace! Couldn't it be hushed up in any way? I am not exactly a Cræsus myself, but if one could lend a helping hand to the old fellow——"

"You seem very much interested concerning him."

The young man darted a quick angry look, and paused, as if he hardly knew whether to be indignant or confidential. He chose the latter.

"My dear fellow, you know I am not of a reserved nature; all about me is plain and aboveboard. Come, I'll be frank with you. It is not likely I should visit the Ansteds as I have done these many months, merely for love of that vulgar, prosy, upstart of a father?"

"I did not suppose it."

“There must have been good blood on the mother’s side, as I hear there was,—or else however could that contemptible old fool have such a bewitching little girl for a daughter? So, the murder will out, Græme! What a creature it is! with its exquisite beauty, and its provoking, innocent, quiet ways. I vow I never was in love with any woman in my life as I could be with Hope Ansted.”

“Possibly!” The set lips opened and closed again upon the one word. Ninian sat looking into the fire as heretofore.

“‘*Possibly!*’ A deal you know about the matter! Græme, you are the most impracticable, frigid old fellow! How many centuries is it since you were in love yourself, eh? How odd you would look going a-wooing with that solemn W. S. face, as your witty little sister used to call it.” And a hearty fit of laughter restored the variable young Irishman from his passing irritation to his usual volatile mood.

Ninian could not laugh. “Will you tell me, Mr. Ulverston, if you are in jest or earnest? Were you serious in what you said just now?”

“About little Hope? Certainly! But you put the question as gravely as if you were her father himself come to demand my ‘intentions.’ Do look a little more sympathetic when a fellow comes and makes confessions to you! I can’t imagine what there is about you that coaxes one into confidence. I do believe I’d trust you with anything, if you were a thought less saturnine and severe.”

“Pardon me,” said Ninian, smiling, for he was somewhat moved by the winning manner that moved everybody. “I have just now many things to make me grave.”

“So have I. But tell me more about old Ansted,” and his former look of vexation returned. “By Heaven! I am glad this happened to-day. Do you know, I was so thoroughly taken in by that sweet little witch, that I believe I should have committed myself to-morrow. There’s no use to try mere harmless flirting with her; she can’t understand it. I had nearly made up my mind, merry bachelor as I am, to yield, and put my neck under the yoke.”

“You mean, in plain words, that you intended—that is, wished—to marry her?”

Ulverston nodded his head, and lifted his

eyebrows pathetically. "Just so. A fellow can't help himself, you know."

Ninian was silent : he kept his lips knitted close, lest one word should give vent to the torrent of passion that he felt within him.

"It would have been a foolish act at best," continued Mr. Ulverston. "Something of a *mésalliance*, as regarded my family, though the girl herself is lady-like, and I could have got rid of the father—found him some appointment abroad, where he might drink himself to death comfortably and nobody be the wiser. I do believe I should soon have 'done the deed,' and turned Benedict."

"You will not, now?"

Mr. Ulverston drew up his elegant person, and looked the young Norman baron to the life. "I marry Hope Ansted? I volunteer to be son-in-law to a low, spendthrift insolvent? No, no, Græme, I have not quite forgotten myself yet. I own I was growing a great fool, but I wash my hands of the matter now." And he hummed the tune of *Lochinvar*—

" 'There are maidens in Scotland more lovely by far,'"—

stopped—frowned—“Pshaw! no Scotswoman for me. Really, Græme, excuse me,” said he, turning his abrupt, even fierce speech into a laugh. “I only mean to say that I prefer an Englishwoman, but certainly that Englishwoman will not be Miss Ansted.”

“Then,” said Ninian—and the great relief in his mind made his manner more cordial—“I conclude the second half of my message will be needless. It was to request that you would not come down to Arlington tomorrow, as she is staying at Lady Ulverston’s, and would rather not see you.”

“She said so, did she? What a little minx!” muttered the young man, in his young man’s pride. This faint repulsion seemed to revive all his passion. He rose from his seat, and began to pace the room. “By Jove, to think of her sending me such a message! And she is staying at Sir Peter’s, you said? I have a great mind to——”

“What?”

“No matter! I really must get over this folly. It is to be hoped she will do the same, poor little girl.”

A wild fear seized Ninian. “Speak truly,” said he. “How far has this matter gone?”

Have you any reason to believe that she loves you? Tell me, on your honour as a gentleman."

Perhaps Mr. Ulverston objected to a lie, unless it was quite necessary; perhaps he feared the result of his visitor's stern sense of right, and had a doubt of being compelled to matrimony. In either case, his answer proved the same; a straightforward, apparently honest, "No!"

"I am glad of it. I should not like to think you a man who could deceive a woman," said Ninian Græme.

For a moment the other seemed to start and cower before him; but soon recovered himself.

"Upon my honour, this conversation is getting too serious for me. You're an awful personage to deal with, Mr. Græme. Come—some more news! How does our fair friend bear her tribulations?"

"Well and patiently."

"Poor little thing! What will she do, I wonder? Go out as a governess? She is far too pretty for that. I don't think I ever knew such a lovely mignonne face. And what delicious hands and feet! A figure

too slight, perhaps; but the daintiest little fairy to waltz with! Good Heavens! no wonder I was half mad after her—I shall be again, if I don't mind."

The young man said this by fits and starts, talking more to himself than aloud. His cheek burned and whitened, his eyes glittered; he was evidently under the strong influence, of something, which if not love was at least the passion which he had all his life been accustomed to ennoble by that name.

"I don't think I can give her up," he went on in a low voice. "Oh! these cursed conventionalities. It's hard enough for a man to be tied down to one woman, whom he marries just to please the world;—but to marry and be ashamed to face the world! I declare to you, Græme"—and in the young man's unholy and uncontrolled feeling he seemed to forget his prudence—"I would do anything to have that girl. If she were only high enough in station to do me credit as my wife—or low enough, so that one need not mind offering her that formal name——"

The words were scarce uttered, when Ninian leaped up with the spring of a tiger.

Before he knew what he was doing, he had seized Ulverston by the throat, and stood over him in a dumbness of fury that was perfectly terrible.

“ Hold off! You’re mad, I think! What do you mean?” gasped the young man, swaying like a child in Ninian’s powerful grasp. The words brought the latter to his right mind.

He let go his hold, and stood upright, facing Ulverston, glaring down upon him—his face livid with a passion that was still unable to find utterance.

There was no need. The two men, looking at each other, felt that they were henceforth foes.

Ulverston muttered something about “ his honour as a gentleman.”

• “ Your honour as a gentleman! Where is your honour as a man, when you could speak so of any woman?”

“ And what right have you——” Here Mr. Ulverston’s voice ceased in a perfect paroxysm of rage.

By this time Ninian had recovered his self-command. He said, more calmly, “ Per-

haps I went too far; but you goaded me on. You must retract these words."

"I will not! You—to rise up and attack a man in his own house—you are a coward! There!"

He lifted his hand to strike the shameful blow, which men hold as a dishonour only to be washed out by blood; but Ninian, with his great strength, grasped the young man's two hands and held them fast as in a vice.

"You shall not strike me—and I will not fight; I hold a duellist to be a murderer. But you shall promise me, on your honour, that you will not attempt to see"—his tongue clove to his mouth, and refused to utter the name—"to see her again, or else——"

"Do you threaten?"

"Or else—though I know not what your past life may have been, except from your own chance hints, which have not implied much good—I will hunt out your whole history, and know whether it answers to those evil words of yours. Do you understand me?"

He did, more keenly than Ninian had ever dreamed. His knees shook, and in his face was the pale answer of an accusing conscience. Doubtless, in some way, the chance arrow had struck home.

Comedy and tragedy, life's jests, and its doom, ever follow after one another. While the two men stood thus, there was heard the knocking that announced Mr. Ulverston's merry troop of more than doubtful guests.

"I will go now," said Ninian Græme, loosing Ulverston's hands. "We never can be friends more."

"No! foes—implacable foes!"

"I should be sorry for that; I used to say I had not an enemy in the world," answered Ninian, half sorrowfully. "If I thought that I had misjudged you, or if, knowing you had erred, I could also know you had repented, still I would hold out to you this hand."

Nay, he even did so, from some vague impulse that made him unwilling to part in anger from the young man.

But Ulverston drew back, and the prof-

ferred hand, like a blessing refused, returned to its owner's bosom.

Without another word, Ninian left the man who had been, if not his friend, at least his companion. In descending he met the entering guests, and stood aside to let them go by. "Mademoiselle" gave him a titter, a ballet-curtsey, a sweep of her silk robe—and passed.

Truly there are often such strange meetings on the world's vast staircase, where, in the words of the nursery rhyme,

"Some go up, and others go down."

CHAPTER XII.

It so happened, that having all Mr. Ansted's business on his hands, Ninian was detained in London for a whole week. This cost him much regret, since, from some vague scruple, he had resolved not to see his little Hope again until he came with Lindsay to take her home to The Gowans. Nor could he hear from her, as he had told her to write to Edinburgh, whither day by day he expected to journey. Perhaps he would not have been so much at ease regarding her, had he not heard accidentally that Mr. Ulverston had suddenly given up his chambers and gone to the Continent. Hope was safe then from any wooing, fair or foul. And one or two brief notes that she wrote to her father were tokens that she was well.

Her faithful guardian compelled himself to rest satisfied, and worked day and night in Mr. Ansted's affairs, until at last he got them somewhat clear.

Then, with a sense of relief impossible to describe, he threw himself into the express train that has won the benediction of many an eager traveller, and started off for Edinburgh.

Somewhere between Derby and Norman-ton, he remembered that for four days he had not seen his brother and Dr. Reay; but these things were unimportant now. He never thought of the matter again, until he saw, sauntering at the terminus, with his old, dreamy, lounging gait, and melancholy look, the worthy Professor.

"Kenneth? Is that you or your wraith? Who would have thought it! Why did you not tell me you were coming to Scotland?"

"I don't know; where was the use of it?" said Kenneth, despondently.

"In the first place, we might have travelled together and been cheerful by the way."

The Professor sighed. There seemed to hang over him a heavy cloud. Ninian re-

membered how dull he had appeared some few days ago, and thought with compunction how disregardful he himself had since been of his old friend.

“Kenneth,” said he, kindly, “is anything the matter? Are you ill? What is the reason of this sudden journey?”

“It is on account of these;” and he touched his eyes.

Ninian recollected what he had scarce noticed at the time, how the Professor had complained of his sight once or twice. But Reay was such a quiet, undemonstrative fellow, who never said a word more than necessary, especially about his corporeal self. Whatever ailed him, mentally or bodily, no one was any the wiser. He bore it, and never said a word.

“Have your eyes been worse?” asked Ninian, anxiously.

“Yes. I went to an oculist at last. I thought it would be as well.”

“And what did he say?”

Reay faltered, and his lip quivered. “It’s no use looking out for my new planet, Græme. Little good was ever done to science by a *blind* astronomer.”

“Good God! You don’t mean that. It is impossible!”

Kenneth shook his head mournfully. “Quite possible. I have thought so a long time. But if it must be, it must be. Never mind.”

There was something so pathetic in this hopeless resignation, that Ninian felt a woman-like choking in his throat.

“I can’t believe it. There must be some hope. Did not the oculist say so?”

“Oh, of course; doctors always do. He told me if I put aside all study, never used my eyes for months, but just travelled about—However, I know better. Don’t let us talk any more about it. Good-by.”

And he was walking away in his melancholy, absent manner, when Ninian detained him. “You don’t think that I shall let you off in this way, old friend? Where do you intend to travel?”

“Anywhere, so that it is in Scotland. I wished to make haste and see the hills and the lochs once more—that I might remember them afterwards.”

Ninian wrung his friend’s hand; in so doing, every lingering of the woman in his heart—and there is no good man’s heart

that has not a little of the woman in it—yearned over Kenneth Reay.

“Cheer up, old fellow,” said he, at last. “Things may not be so bad as you suppose. You must obey orders, and give up work.”

“It is easy to talk,” answered Reay, musing; “I, that used to say a man should never give up working while he lived. And I’m not so old as I seem; I’m not forty yet. It is rather hard.”

Ninian, suddenly picturing to himself the future of this lonely, self-enclosed, self-dependent existence, acknowledged that it was hard.

For the moment, his own cares slipped from him, and his mind was filled with the thought of Kenneth’s trouble.

“I’ll tell you what, Reay, I will not part from you here. You shall go home with me to-night, and be cheered by my woman-kind; Lindsay will be very kind to you; and ‘Tinie——”

He paused, noticing the sudden changing of the Professor’s countenance; he had forgotten one half of the poor fellow’s griefs.

“I think,” he added, “that ‘Tinie is staying with her married sisters. There will

be only Lindsay and Charlie at The Gowans. Nay, but you must come."

The Professor lingered, hesitated,—at last yielded. "Anyhow, I think I should like *to see* them all once more," said he, with a mournful meaning in the phrase.

So Ninian carried him off unresistingly.

Unluckily, in spite of the elder brother's conviction, Lindsay was not at home, and that wild, mischievous, wilful Tinie was. She gave immediate token of the fact by her cry of delight in the hall, and her arms almost smothering Ninian the moment he descended.

Now, for some months past, all things had not been quite as heretofore between Mr. Græme and his pet sister. A slight reserve on his part—on hers an occasional wilfulness, a restlessness that made her shrink from home, and take to all sorts of gaieties abroad—had effected some trifling change in the relation that had once been so close and fond. It was many weeks since Tinie had sprang to him as tenderly as she did now. But absence is a good teacher sometimes.

"Ah! I was wiser than sister Lindsay.

I knew you would be here to-night!" cried she; "and what is the news of London? How is Edmund—and Hope—and Miss Reay—and the——"

Possibly she was about to say "the Professor," when the sudden vision of his real presence took the word out of her mouth. Miss Tinie gave an undisguised start, turned as pale as if she had seen a ghost, and then began to laugh violently. Lastly, waking up to a consciousness of her own dignity, she favoured her old instructor with a graceful welcome, and inquired, half in jest, half in earnest, why, after this long interval of time, she had the honour of seeing him there?

Kenneth, making some incomprehensible answer, walked in, pale and quiet; and took his old corner by the fire, just as if he had not been away a week.

"Any letters, Tinie?" asked Ninian, eagerly, looking in the place where they usually lay. There was one from Hope, a brief note, dated the morning after he had left her, full of gratitude, affection, and content. Still he wondered she had not written since; but perhaps she might to-morrow.

He must not be too exacting over his darling. So he sat down to wait until Lindsay came home, and to think how much he should tell her of Hope's troubles, and of his own thoughts and plans concerning the child.

Meanwhile Tinie, with flushed cheek, and gay, excited manner, went about the household cares, in which, to say the least, she was not very expert. At intervals she laughed and chattered with Kenneth Reay, tormenting him with more than her former pertinacity ; but in every jest there seemed an under-lying bitterness, which increased the more according as he grew silent and absent. At last he seemed too dull to mind her at all.

"Well, and what have you done this long while in London? You are growing the greatest man there, I suppose? And you have left your old hobby of geology, and taken to astronomy? Have you settled your favourite subject, the parallax of the fixed stars?"

Kenneth Reay sighed, but it was not on account of her and her teasing. He was evidently not thinking of Tinie at all. Pos-

sibly, the greater pain had conquered the less. His devotion to science was after all the truest passion of his soul, and the fear of a lost life was more terrible than that of a lost love.

"How miserable you look," said 'Tinie, getting wicked. "Come, be polite, and help me a little. Take the kettle and pour out some water."

He obeyed ; rising up, and walking with a mechanical step, putting his hands out as if uncertain of his movements.

"Take care, Professor,—how careless you are; you'll scald me in a minute," cried 'Tinie, springing aside. "I declare you go about as if you were blind."

At the word he started, set down his awkward burden, and said in a slow melancholy voice,

"That is true, Miss 'Tinie, quite true; God help me!" He put his hand over his eyes, and walked out of the room unsteadily, like one thoroughly crushed with woe.

"What have I done? What is the matter?" cried 'Tinie, half-pettishly, half-anxiously. But Ninian, passing her with one of the most reproving even angry looks

that she had ever seen him wear, followed his friend.

He returned a few minutes afterwards, and found her sitting in her place, very dolefully. Seeing him, she tried to laugh.

"Well—now, perhaps, brother, you will condescend to explain why your beloved Doctor Reay has grown so very dignified, and you so very particular. As if I were not allowed to teaze him, indeed! I that have done so ever since I was a little girl."

"You ought to cease now—and I desire you will. He is in no mood for trifling. There is great trouble come upon poor Kenneth Reay."

Tinie was but a woman; and though once more she said, jestingly, "What's the matter?" her little face turned very pale, and her hand shook.

"What you so thoughtlessly said was true. I am afraid that very soon he will be quite blind."

The girl started up in her chair. "It can't be! I'll not believe it."

But when she saw how grave and sad Ninian looked, she sank down again. He explained all.

“It is a terrible thing for Kenneth, and he feels it very much. Not so much for the ruin of his worldly prospects, because he wants little, and will always have enough to live upon; but because, to all intents and purposes, his career in science is at an end. If he had any friend to be to him in the place of eyes and help him in his work, that at least some remnant of sight might be saved—but he has no one. I don’t know any man in the world more thoroughly lonely than he is, or soon will be. Tinie, the little you see of him—and I shall take care that you see him as little as possible—I entreat and desire that you say no word which might wound his feelings. He is not a fit subject for your jests—a man broken-hearted and blind.”

All this time Tinie had listened in silence—her eyes fixed and distended. At the last word they closed—her head sank in her hands, and she burst into an uncontrollable passion of tears.

Ninian was utterly astonished. Was it possible that she cared for him then—him whom she had refused and even ridiculed? Had she, gay young creature as she was, turned

from her hosts of adorers to love this quaint, uncourtly, middle-aged follower of science? If so, it was one of the numerous eccentricities of women's affections, frequently quite unaccountable.

Ninian looked at his favourite sister, who still sat crying bitterly. There was no mistaking her emotion now. He hardly knew whether he was glad or sorry, but he was certainly deeply moved.

"Tinie, I think I guess all. Be candid with your brother. You know poor Kenneth has had but one attachment all his life, and that was——"

"I know. He told me," she said, between her sobs.

"You are sorry now for what you threw away—is it so?"

She made no answer, but sobbed on. She was growing a very Niobe, poor child!

"Would you marry him now, if he asked you?" said Ninian, in plain words, for he felt the case was urgent. "Answer, honestly, yes, or no?"

Some trace of her former spirit flashed in Tinie's eyes, and she seemed unwilling to reply.

"Forgive me; the question is not mine to put, and, perhaps, after all, things are best as they are. He is getting an old man—old before his time."

"I don't think so," said she, resolutely.

"This misfortune stops his career. He might have been the greatest man of the day; now he will never make a higher reputation than he has already made."

"That is not so very small, I believe," was the answer, as Tinie drew herself up, rather proudly, and ceased crying.

"If you married him, think what your life would be! In everything he would have to depend on you. True, he has a noble heart, pure and good as ever man's was; but some of these days—ay, and before very long—he will grow feeble and aged."

"No matter!"

"He will be as eccentric as ever; moreover, helpless and blind."

"I don't care!" cried Tinie, dashing her hands from her eyes, and rising up, until there was something heroic in her small figure, and something of beautiful earnestness in her face. "I don't care in the least

for that, brother Ninian!" she added, almost in defiance.

But he held out his arms to her, smiling; whereupon the little Amazon threw herself into them, and cried her wilfulness away. So the elder brother knew that he would have to give away his last sister, his pet for many years. Embracing her, he felt that in neither's heart did the other hold the first place now. It was natural—quite natural! Still, as he kissed her forehead, and called her his "wee thing," his voice faltered and his eyelids were moist.

"There, we'll not be sentimental, my pet. Now, what is to be done next?—must I go and tell him?"

"No, no!"

And Ninian, with a fellow-feeling for his old friend, thought it was even best that Kenneth should find out his happiness for himself.

He merely went and called him from the study. The worthy soul came in; he seemed to have forgotten his sudden emotion, and was his old self again. He never stirred from his corner, and scarcely spoke,—except once, when that wayward

damsel brought him his tea, an act of kindly attention quite unprecedented on her part.

"Thank you, Miss Christina, you are very good." And looking up, he discovered her gentle penitential air. Perhaps, too—unless his poor blind eyes were very dim indeed—he saw hers, swimming with tears that could not be restrained. He started, and over his plain weatherbeaten face came a quivering. "I hope I have not offended you? It was very wrong in me," said the Professor, humbly.

"No, it was all my fault. But I did not mean——" Here Tinie abruptly retreated to the table, where, in her contrite confusion, she managed slowly to pour the whole contents of the teapot into the sugar-basin—a disaster which formed the principal event of the meal.

Tea was at last over. Ninian, full of his own thoughts, had retreated to his arm-chair, to long for Lindsay's coming. He almost ceased to notice his companions, else perhaps he might have been amused by the pretty womanly pacifications with which Tinie sought to make atonement for the wound she had given.

But nothing would draw poor Kenneth out of his despondent mood. However, he answered her conversation, which was timid and meek to a degree quite comical in Miss Tinie. He even moved from his corner to look over some new mathematical books she brought, to show him she had not been quite idle in those studies which formed such a curious contrast to her volatility of character. Of which studies perhaps the solution was,—what in nine cases out of ten is the solution of a woman's favourite pursuits. The heart is the best bias of the intellect.

A scientific book was an infallible temptation to Kenneth Reay. Forgetting the doom that haunted him, he shaded his enfeebled eyes with his hand, and began eagerly to read.

"Nay, you must not do that, you know," whispered Tinie, as she drew the book away.

Kenneth sank back in his chair with a bitter, bitter sigh.

If any one had seen the expression of Tinie's face, as, kneeling by the table, she turned and looked at him,—it would have won forgiveness for all her little faults.

There was the woman's nature in her still.

"You must not be so unhappy. I know all. Don't mind it. We'll help you to bear it," said she, in a broken voice. It might be only sympathy ; perhaps he thought it was. He answered as disconsolately as ever.

"Thank you, but nobody can help me. I must bear it myself. I may get used to it in time, if it is slow in coming. Some have been contented with it." (He always said "it," as if the plain word *blindness* were by him unutterable.) "There was Huber, for instance;"—and he stopped.

They both knew Huber's story—how a devoted wife was to him "eyes to the blind;" and how happily the philosopher lived in his long darkness, leaving behind him a renowned name. It was an allusion that struck Kenneth painfully, and heavier and gloomier became his silence.

"Ah!" murmured Tinie, every sense of pride overcome by pity, "I can't bear to see you so sad. We'll comfort you ; you shall come to live in Edinburgh again ; you shall teach me as you used to do ; and I will

try to improve, that I may write and read to you. Oh! if you would but forgive me!" Still kneeling, she held out her hands in child-like humility.

Kenneth Reay at first seemed totally bewildered; then his apathy broke down, and his manhood, with its one deep passion, struggled into life.

"Miss Christina—little 'Tinie, don't make game of me! You are a young, merry lassie; I a poor, lonely old man, and blind."

"Kenneth!"—She laid her forehead on his hard, broad hand, and, whether he saw or not, the Professor might have felt her tears.

Just then Tinie's elder brother woke up from his meditations to the knowledge of what was passing. A wise man was Ninian Græme! So he did the wisest and best thing he could have done under the circumstances—he quietly rose, and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE were no confessions made to Lindsay that night ; for she came home in time only to hear a full account of what, in a brief letter, Ninian had already told her—the change which had fallen upon the Ansteds. It was not until next day after breakfast, when the brother and sister were sitting in that most anxious of all employments, waiting for the post, that Mr. Græme found courage to begin what he had to unfold unto that patient ear—open to him, almost like a mother's, during his whole life.

There was Tinie's little episode first. From the parlour-window they saw her tripping about in the spring morning, sometimes flitting hither and thither in her butterfly fashion, but oftener coming to the Pro-

fessor's side, with the evident feeling that there she would soon fold her gossamer wings and settle down into a new form of existence. As for Kenneth Reay himself, he looked a new man. He seemed to have grown ten years younger. He walked with head erect, as if courting the sun to shine upon him and his happiness. For the time being he had forgotten his blindness, his despondency, his fear. Well! against the shadow came again, perhaps he might be able to meet it.

Poor fellow!—It is a strange truth—true alike to both men and women, one which all feel, while few will confess—that though the human heart may know peace, content, serene endurance, even thankfulness, it never does and never can know *happiness*,—the sense of complete, full-rounded bliss—except in the joy of happy love. It may be or have been—a mere gleam, brief as a moment; but for the time it was a taste of heaven, the most perfect that ever can be known here.

There is a little poem of Chamisso, called “The Three Sisters.” Each, crushed with misery, contends that her own lot has been

the hardest to bear. One, Death has bereaved of her lover; another mourns over her fallen idol's shame. The third, speaking of the two, says, envyingly, "*Have they not lived and loved?*"—

“ ‘In one brief sentence all my bitter cause
Of sorrow dwells; then, arbiter, oh! pause,
Ere yet thy final judgment thou assign,
And learn my better right, too clearly proved;
Four words comprise it—*I was never loved!*
The palm of grief, thou wilt allow, is mine.’ ”

Chamisso knew humanity. There can be no grief like that grief!

Possibly, Ninian Græme might never have read this poem. But something of its spirit touched him now, as he watched his sister and his friend, and longed for the time when his own life, now incomplete, should be perfected with such a moment of joy. Perhaps, this was a feeling more akin to a woman's sentiment than to a man's passion; but in its holy tenderness and self-renunciation, Ninian's love had all along shared much of the womanly character—at least, that which is our ideal of a woman's love. Which, alas! we may in vain look for among a score of Miss Smiths or Miss Browns, any

more than we may look for the heroic devotion, the manly faithfulness, the life-long truth, of the knights and poets of old, in the Mr. Smiths and Mr. Browns that we meet in society. Yet love is love, and faithfulness is faithfulness. Ay, and both exist sometimes, to prove that all life and all goodness is not a delusive poetic dream.

But we must go back to Ninian and his sister, standing at the window, watching the two, who, though a couple strangely contrasted, might evidently come under the category of true lovers.

"You see how it is, Lindsay," said Ninian smiling. "I thought it was so, on Reay's side at least,—long ago. We will soon have the last of our young birds taking wing, and you and I will be left in the nest alone."

Miss Græme did not quite understand at first. When her brother had further enlightened her innocent mind on the state of affairs, she was considerably affected.

"Do you really mean that Tinie loves in earnest at last? Poor child! Was that the reason that she came to my bedside last night, kissed me, and cried, though she said

she was very happy ? I thought it was because you were come home."

"Not quite," smiled the elder brother, though he lightly sighed,—which he felt the while to be a piece of most unwarrantable jealousy.

"So Kenneth has loved her all these years ! And to think of her having refused him, liking him all the while,—I cannot understand that !" said the perplexed Lindsay, whose simple nature was indeed not likely to understand the vagaries of such a character as Tinie's.

"Still, 'All's well that ends well.' We ought to be quite satisfied, sister. Kenneth will make a much better husband for our Tinie than any of her other swains; and she is happy with him, poor lassie !"

"But then he is so old—seventeen or eighteen years older than herself. I think people who marry ought to be of equal age."

"I do not see that," answered Ninian in a low voice, as the colour rose slightly on his cheek. "When a man has passed his youth, and become tried and hardened, perhaps embittered, in the world, he is the more likely

to love some young creature who brings back to his memory everything that he has ceased to be. Don't you think so, Lindsay?"

Anxiously he looked at her, fancying, as all who hold a close, dear secret fancy, that she must surely be divining what he meant afterwards to reveal. But she was watching the couple on the lawn.

"It is very strange, certainly!" said she, *à propos* of nothing, or of her own meditation.

"Not at all strange. There is no inequality in such a marriage. He gives her wisdom, experience, steady and faithful love, such as few young men ever feel; she gives him freshness, cheerfulness, and hope. She comes to him 'like the dew of his youth.' Think, Lindsay," and there was a trembling in Ninian's voice—"think how sweet it must be, when one is tired with battling against the world, to have a loving little creature creeping close to one's heart, driving out everything amiss there, and making it feel young again! How one would protect her,—how she would be not only a cherished wife, but something like the poor man's pet-

lamb in the Bible-story—the one ewe-lamb, ‘that was unto him as a daughter.’ ”

While Ninian talked thus, leaning against the side of the window, his countenance wore a strangely softened beauty. Lindsay looked surprised, but still her mind was too full of Tinie’s affairs to enter into speculations of any other kind.

Ninian saw that he must explain himself more clearly. He might do so, for now the wooing and wedding of his youngest sister took away the last of his cares. There was no reason why his marriage should not immediately follow hers. And Lindsay,—who had ever shown such tender affection over his darling,—surely it would add to Lindsay’s happiness if he brought Hope to The Gowans “for gude and a’.”

The Gowans should be their home then. He thought Hope would choose it so; she had such a tenderness for the dear old place. They would never part with Lindsay, either. With her gentle spirit, there was no fear of her turning out that dreaded personage, an overbearing sister-in-law living in the house. She would be, as she had always been, like a mother in affection. It might

even make her happier, when, all her young flock being dispersed, there would spring up a new generation for the solitary woman to fold in her arms, and yearn over with the yearnings which those only know who mingle therewith the solemn remembrance of what to themselves might have been—and is denied for evermore.

Ninian felt instinctively what would be the love of his sister towards his children.

His children! At the thought all the strong man's soul was bowed within him; its infinite emotion was almost too mighty to bear.

Mr. Græme stood for many minutes by his sister's side in silence.

"The post is late to-day," Lindsay said, "I wonder if it will bring a letter from dear little Hope."

"Probably."

Why on that hint Ninian did not speak, was a circumstance known only to himself. But he felt agitated, trembling, overpowered even by the timidity of a boy.

"Lindsay," said he at length, "our house will be very lonely soon."

"It will indeed!" sighed the elder sister.
"But Tinie may not marry just yet."

"I think she will. Kenneth entreated me so, last night. Perhaps, if he could have some one always near to aid him, his eyesight might be saved—at least partially. Look at Tinie now! She will be a devoted little wife to him."

Miss Græme looked, and once more sighed,
"Ay, she seems full of content, but it is hard to lose her. I can't see why all our children should go and marry."

"Still," answered Ninian, gently, "a happy marriage is the happiest thing on earth. No true, unselfish brother or sister would stand in the way of that."

"Oh no!" And Lindsay became thoughtful.

"After all, sister, you and I ought to thank God for the lightening of our cares. Our three sisters provided for—Edmund settled too; for, as you know, he is determined to be nothing but an author, and is very successful already. Besides, Reay tells me he will not part with him."

"Good Kenneth!" murmured Miss Græme.

Her eyes brightened at the mention of her darling boy.

"Then, Reuben he is doing well in the world; and we shall have him near us—though I don't think he will ever care to live at home again. And for Charlie, if the boy must go to sea, why he must! Nothing else will satisfy him. Perhaps it is for the best! He may be an admiral yet."

Her own faint smile again lightened Our Sister's face. The young scapegrace had given her many cares; but he was the last born of the flock, and she loved him.

"Well, as I said before, when all our youngsters are flown away, you and I will be very lonely, Lindsay."

"Not if we do as you hinted last night, and take poor Hope back to The Gowans for a little. I should be so glad. But then she might do like the rest," added the troubled elder sister—"she might go away and marry."

"She need not," answered Ninian, his firm lips quivering, as he knew the moment was come when he must speak in audible words the secret he had kept so carefully and so long. But Lindsay interrupted him.

“ Ah—there is the postman! Perhaps he brings letters from that dear child. I must go !”

She left the room with quick eager step. But Ninian’s feet seemed glued to the earth where he stood.

“ Letters—plenty! And here is one in the child’s own hand addressed to me. But will you like to open it, brother?”

It is strange—and each and all of us may have proved this—that at some crisis of fulfilled expectation we seem frost-bound. We cannot stir a step to meet the coming guest, or to snatch at the long-desired letter; we grow cold all over—powerless and silent.

Thus Ninian stood, while Lindsay opened the letter.

He was still at the window, looking out at the sunny garden and the flowers, lest, perhaps, his sister should look at him. A little disappointment he felt. Why did Hope write to Lindsay only?

Miss Græme read a page or more. “ She is quite well”—Ninian turned—“ and happy, too; says how much she thinks of us all, and how kind you have been.” He turned back

again abruptly; then crossed the room, sat down, and opened the leaves of a book.

“Read on, sister. I would like to hear——”

But Lindsay had stopped—tears starting in her eyes. “Oh, brother, here is news—glad news of our dear child. She is engaged to be married.”

There was one quick shudder—a blank, incredulous stare; but Ninian sat in his seat, motionless.

Miss Græme continued. “It is so sudden, so unexpected, she says. Amidst all her misfortunes, too! Who would have thought that of Mr. Ulverston? But, Ninian—do you hear? Ninian!”

He lifted his head, and looked her full in the face. The countenance she then saw his sister never forgot to her dying day.

“Brother—brother?”

“Yes!” The voice sounded unnatural—awful.

“O my poor brother!” Lindsay cried. She understood all now.

There was no more spoken. His head fell again upon his arms; he neither groaned

nor moved. For many minutes his sister sat watching him thus, not daring by word or gesture to break upon the hush of such a grief.

At last, he stirred a little—passed his hand over his forehead, as if to remove some bewilderment there—looked up and saw his sister.

His ashen lips tried to smile. “Well, Lindsay?”

She did not answer, but came to him—this eldest sister who so loved him! She took his hand; and then seeing that he was quite passive, she put her arms round his neck as she had done when he was a boy. He leant against her; and falling one by one upon her black dress she saw his tears—those tears which a man sometimes pours out like drops of his life-blood. At last they stopped—so did hers, too; and the brother and sister drew apart from each other, without having said a word.

Nor ever afterwards did either, by questioning or by confession, break that solemn silence.

Ninian rose and sat upright in his chair. His eyes glancing round, fell upon the half-

read letter. He pointed to it. "Now, sister, go on."

Lindsay hesitated, and looked with a feeling of repulsion at the fatal writing.

"Go on—read it aloud," said Ninian, with that quiet voice which every one obeyed.

Lindsay read. There was a page of overflowing affection—tenderer even than Hope's wont, towards the whole family—Ninian most of all. And then she came, hesitatingly, as a timid girl would, to the news of her engagement. On the very evening of the day when she last wrote to Mr. Græme, this change in her destiny had come. The same night she wrote to Lindsay, in womanly shyness choosing her rather than her brother, unto whom to tell these tidings.

"I am happy," ran the letter. "Yes, I think I am happy! I always liked Mr. Ulverston—he was so kind to me. But I was terrified lest, fancying I was rich, he should ask me to marry him, as papa wished, and then find out how greatly he had been deceived. I never would have married him then. But now, when we have been ruined, and he knows me to be nothing but a penniless girl—for him to come and seek me—oh! it is so noble

—so generous! I ought to love him, dear Lindsay! and I suppose—yes—I think I do.

“ Besides, I have no home; for, kind as Mr. Græme is, I know it would be wrong for me to burden him by living at The Gowans. He had so many cares and worked so hard, as I remember well. No, it is better that there is somebody who loves me and will take me home, and whom I will try to make happy always.

“ Mr. Ulverston will be very kind to my father too, if he promises to live always in America. But he says—that is, Mr. Ulverston says—he can do nothing until we are married, which must be very soon. It is strange—oh, Lindsay, I tremble! But I am so desolate and unprotected, and he so generous! And then he loves me so!

“ He will post this letter himself, for I said I must write and inform you, and my dear guardian and brother. What will Mr. Græme say to my marriage? I think he will be pleased—Mr. Ulverston tells me so. I hope he will not fancy what I said about not marrying Mr. Ulverston was false—I spoke my true feelings, at the time.

“ Write to me soon, dearest friends! I

am not quite happy until I hear from you. I cannot tell you more. Mr. Ulverston is very anxious to hasten our marriage; but I do not know when it will be."

"It is not yet, then," cried Ninian, suddenly roused. "Perhaps, if she knew all, it might never be. We must save her, Lindsay."

"But — she loves him," said Lindsay mournfully.

"I do not believe it." And all Ninian's strong clear mind seemed to come into him again, as if it were another that suffered and not he—so mighty above all things was his guardian tenderness over the child. "She likes him—she is grateful to him—he has such winning ways. But if she only knew him truly—No, it is impossible. Hope could not love that man."

And then, so far as passion allowed him utterance, he told his sister of what had passed between himself and Mr. Ulverston, on the last night they met.

"Look now what he has done! He has spread the report that he was gone abroad, and stolen down secretly to that child. He propose to marry her — poor and disgraced

as she is ! Very generous ! Very honourable ! except that he is all false—he must be. If he marries her, he will make her wretched ; if otherwise ”—Ninian ground his teeth together, struggling against the fierce passion that shook him. “ And all that while I was in London, and knew nothing ! ”

Lindsay sat silent and trembling. She was terrified to see her brother thus.

“ Give me the letter ; let me see the date. It should have been here—four—five—six days ago. He has kept it back, you see.”

“ Oh, brother,” cried Lindsay, shuddering at the expression of Ninian’s face.

“ Hush ! let me think.” He put his hand over his brow, violently striving to repress every feeling but that of clear judgment. He took Hope’s letter with unshrinking hand, and read it all through himself,—with those poor eyes yet scorching from the fiery drops they had shed. At last he rose, and walked steadily to Lindsay’s side.

“ I know what must be done. You and I must start for London at once. You will stay with the child till — till her marriage. For that man—I will find out all his past

life, as I told him I should. If he is a villain, which I truly believe, though I am clear of nothing, he shall not marry her. I say, he shall not! If I have wronged him—if she loves him—then—you and I can stay for the marriage, Lindsay.”

What a tone it was! what a smile!

“Now, get ready,” he continued. “You see there is not a moment to be lost. We must start immediately. You can manage it, can you not? Everything can be as we planned last night.”

And he paused, as if the contrast thus suddenly presented smote him with a keen pang.

“We can leave this afternoon,” said Lindsay. “Only I would like just time enough to send for Esther or Ruth.”

“What matters that?” was Ninian’s sharp answer; and then he held out his hand to his sister. “You must bear with me, Lindsay; I am not quite myself.”

Then, seeming afraid that he had too much betrayed his feelings, he went to the table and began to glance over the letters that were still untouched. One or two he

carelessly thrust to Lindsay—"Read them, sister, it will save a little time."

The first she opened made her cast a quick, frightened look at her brother. He was standing with his back to her. Lindsay had self-command enough to read on to the end of the brief note, and then stole to Ninian's side. He turned round.

"Come, sister, give me the letters, and then go and make your preparations. We have very little time before we start."

"Wait, just one minute." She showed him the envelope of the letter, which was in Mr. Ulverston's handwriting. There was a note inside, not from him, but from Hope. "It gives news—sudden news."

Ninian turned ghastly pale—he grasped the chair convulsively. "What is it?—Tell me?"

Lindsay was silent—only coming nearer and clinging to him, as in moments of anguish or sympathy women do.

"Tell me," he repeated, almost inaudibly.

"Two days ago, suddenly—by Ulverston's persuasions and her father's—Hope was—*married*!"

Ninian remained a moment where he

stood—upright, motionless—then he tried to move and walk to the door, but staggered as he went. Lindsay followed.

“No, sister—good kind sister—don’t!”

She obeyed, and he passed from her sight to bear that awful grief—as only it could be borne—alone.

END OF VOL. II.

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